

Since the seminal work of Speas & Tenny (2003), the hypothesis of Speech Act projections at the top of the left periphery, encoding the speech event and its participants, has been exploited to analyse a wide range of syntactic phenomena (anchoring of grammatical person, Bianchi 2003, Sigurdhsson 2004; evidentiality, Speas 2004; person hierarchy effects, Bianchi 2006; vocatives, Moro 2003, Hill 2007; tense interpretation, Giorgi 2010; argument drop, Sigurdhsson 2011; honorifics and discourse particles, Miyagawa forthcoming; and many more). On the other hand, in compositional semantics the assumption of a Speech Act Phrase is controversial, and when assumed, this projection is taken to convey the illocutionary force of the sentence (in a way partly similar to Rizzi's 1997 Force: see in particular Krifka 2013; Kamali & Krifka 2020; Farkas 2022).

A more recent development is the distinction of two components of the speech act of assertion: on the one hand, the speaker commits themselves to the truth of the asserted proposition; on the other, they propose to the addressee that the asserted proposition update the common ground (Farkas & Bruce 2010). This double nature has led to the distinction between an Act phrase and a Commitment Phrase (Krifka 2015: 332-33; with the further addition of a Judgement Phrase in Krifka 2020). Crucially, while in assertions the committed participant is the speaker, in questions it is the addressee that is required to commit themselves to the true answer (cf. Speas & Tenny's 'interrogative flip').

In this talk, partly based on joint work with S. Cruschina, I argue that the distinction of two compositional layers can account for the interpretive import of certain non-canonical questions that do not strictly require an answer from the addressee, and thus appear to be pointless in terms of information exchange:

(i) confirmation question such as (1):

(1) [*A meeting B*] Did you have your hair cut? You're gorgeous!

(ii) rhetorical questions, e.g. (2):

(2) [*A to B during an argument*] Did you ever lift a finger to help me?

(iii) surprise-disapproval questions, e.g. (3):

(3) [*A enters B's room and finds them in bed*] Are you still in bed at this hour?!

In a nutshell, I propose that the lower compositional layer conveys that the addressee's epistemic state entails the positive answer, and the higher layer encodes the speaker's evaluation of the likelihood of this state of affairs. In other terms, the speaker evaluates how likely it is that the addressee would give a positive answer. The analysis is implemented in the Kratzerian approach to graded modality (see Kratzer 2012): in confirmation questions,

the speaker believes that the positive answer is more likely than the negative one; in rhetorical questions, the speaker is certain that the addressee's epistemic state entails the negative answer rather than the positive one (or viceversa in some cases); finally, in surprise-disapproval questions the speaker is certain – based on the circumstantial evidence – that the addressee's epistemic state entails the positive answer, and in addition, the positive answer is marked as dispreferred w.r.t. the speaker's expectations and preferences. Empirical evidence in support of this characterization comes from the distribution of the so-called what-particles in central and southern dialects spoken in Italy (Bianchi & Cruschina 2022).

The significance of this proposal for syntactic cartography has two aspects. On the one hand, it provides empirical support for a further elaboration of the left periphery of main clauses, which retains Speas & Tenny's original insight of distinct speaker- and addressee-anchored projections. From a broader perspective, this proposal shows that the fine-grained characterization of syntactic data afforded by cartography has a parallel at the semantic level. Thus, cartography complies with a minimalist assumption whereby the internal mechanisms of the syntactic component comply with interface conditions, without being strictly determined by them.

#### Essential references

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- Speas, Margaret & Carol Tenny. 2003. Configurational properties of point of view roles. In: Di Sciullo, Anna Maria, (ed), *Asymmetries in grammar*, 315-345. John Benjamins.