

Modal Evidentials in Questions

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Overview. When added to a question, a grammatical evidential can result in an utterance which lacks interrogative force. This is shown in (1) for in Gitksan: when the evidential =*ima* is added to a question, as in (1a), it turns it into a statement of uncertainty or wondering, as in (1b).

- (1) a. na ‘ant stil-(t)=s John=a
who S.REL accompany-3=PN.DET John=INTERG
‘Who went with John?’
- b. na=*ima* ‘ant stil-(t)=s John=a
who=*EVID* S.REL accompany-3=PN.DET John=INTERG
‘I wonder who went with John.’ (Gitksan)

We call the kind of utterance in (1b) *evidential questions* (EvQs). We provide an analysis of EvQs which derives their semantics and pragmatics from independently-motivated elements: (i) a Hamblin-style analysis of questions, (ii) a modal semantics for the evidential, and (iii) the evidence presuppositions introduced by the evidential. We argue that the evidential distributes its presuppositions to each of the propositions in the denotation of the question, and that the union of these presuppositions is the source of the reduced interrogative force of the EvQ. We also provide a typology of question constructions based on all four possibilities with respect to speaker and hearer knowledge.

Data. As well as in Gitksan, we find EvQs in at least three other languages of the Americas: Nl̓eʔkepmxcín (Thompson Salish), St’át’imcets (Lillooet Salish), as in (2), and Cuzco Quechua as in (3).

- (2) a. cúz’=ha ts7as s=Bill
going.to=YNQ come NOM=Bill
‘Is Bill going to come?’
- b. cúz’=ha=*k’a* ts7as s=Bill
going.to=YNQ=*EVID* come NOM=Bill
‘I wonder if Bill is going to come.’ (St’át’imcets)
- (3) a. may-manta chay runa?
where-from that person
‘Where’s that person from?’
- b. may-manta-*chá*
where-from-*EVID*
‘Who knows?/Wherever!/He could be from anywhere.’ (Cuzco Quechua)

EvQs do not correspond to rhetorical questions; a rhetorical question is uttered in a context in which both the speaker and the addressee know the answer, while an ordinary question is uttered in a context in which the speaker does not, and the addressee may or may not, know the answer (Caponigro & Sprouse 2007). An EvQ, on the other hand, indicates both that the speaker does not know the answer and that the speaker expects that the hearer also does not know the answer:

- (4) *Question-types based on expectations of speaker/addressee knowledge of the answer:*

	Speaker knows answer	Speaker believes Addressee knows answer
<i>Ordinary Questions (OQ)</i>	No	Yes
<i>Evidential Questions (EvQ)</i>	No	No
<i>Rhetorical Questions (RQ)</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>Exclamatory 'Question' (ExQ)</i>	Yes	(No)

Analysis of OQs and EvQs. We adopt a common analysis of questions as denoting Hamblin sets: sets of propositions containing all possible answers, as shown in (5-6).

- (5) Denotation of (1a): {that Gwen went with John, that Alvin went with John, ...}
 (6) Denotation of (2a): {that Bill is going to come, that Bill is not going to come}

We argue that (1b), (2b), and (3b) are still structurally and semantically questions: they still denote Hamblin sets, but their interrogative force is reduced by the addition of the evidential. Following previous work (Matthewson et al. 2007, Faller 2002, Littell et al. 2010, Peterson 2010), we assume that the conjectural evidential is, or has as part of its semantics, an epistemic possibility modal. We then claim that the conjectural evidential distributes over each of the propositions in the Hamblin set. The result is a set of propositions, each of which makes a possibility assertion. We argue that the EQs have a reduced interrogative force, due to the fact that the evidential – unlike a plain English modal – also introduces a *presupposition of inferential evidence* to each proposition in the set, as shown in (7-8).

- (7) Denotation of (1b), including [*presuppositions*]: {that Bill is going to come [*presupposing there is evidence that he will come*], that Bill is not going to come [*presupposing there is evidence that he won't come*]}
 (8) Denotation of (2b): {that the person is possibly from Lima [*presupposing there is evidence he is from Lima*], that the person is possibly from Cuzco [*presupposing there is evidence he is from Cuzco*], ...}

We argue that the presupposition introduced by a question is the conjunction of the presuppositions of its Hamblin-set of answers. The resulting presupposition – that there is mixed or conflicting evidence – is crucial in signaling to the hearer that they are not expected to know the answer. This correctly predicts that EvQs are bad in situations in which the addressee clearly *does* know the answer, as in (9) (cf. also Rocci 2007:147). We thus derive the effect of changing the speech-act function of the utterance, without having to stipulate an extra speech-act operator, and while using only independently-motivated semantics for questions and for evidentials.

RQs and ExQs as mirativity. Rhetorical questions usually affirm something both the speaker and addressee already know, usually for the effect of expressing sarcasm. Similarly, wh-exclamatives have the semantics of a question, but pragmatically function as statements of surprise or unexpectedness; they are not requests for information, as the speaker knows the 'answer'. In Gitksan neither OCs nor EvQs can be used to express a rhetorical question. Additionally, wh-exclamatives in Gitksan are not based on the syntax or semantics of questions, nor do they have an exclamatory intonational contour as they do English. Rather, in Gitksan the use of another evidential *n'akw* can, in certain specific contexts, take a declarative sentence and

turn it into either an RQ or, based on the parameters in (4), what we call an *exclamatory question* (ExQ). In (9), the speaker is frustrated the batter in a baseball game keeps missing the ball:

- (9) *n'akw=hl sins-t*
EVID=CND blind-3sg
RHETORICAL QUESTION (RQ): 'Is he blind?'
WH-EXCLAMATIVE (ExQ): 'How blind this guy is!'
(DECLARATIVE: 'Looks like he's blind.')

We claim that it is not the evidential content of *n'akw* that leads to this effect, but rather the modal content that is asserted in a context where the speaker 'knows the answer', which in normal contexts would lead to infelicity (i.e. you can't say 'it *must* be raining' if you know that it is raining). We speculate that the 'misuse' of the indirect *n'akw* in a direct evidence contexts modifies the speech act from a declarative to a mirative. As such, RQs and ExQs in these languages can be linked to *mirativity*, the grammatical encoding of surprise (Peterson 2016).

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