

Semantics: discourse particles

Back when we were talking about definite and indefinite articles...

DOG BITES MAN

PRESIDENT MEETS POPE

Back when we were talking about definite and indefinite articles...

DOG BITES MAN

PRESIDENT MEETS POPE

A dog bites **a** man

The President meets **the** Pope

Back when we were talking about definite and indefinite articles...

A dog bit a man

The dog bit a man

Back when we were talking about definite and indefinite articles...

A dog bit a man

The dog bit a man

→ same ‘meaning’ in one sense; the difference has to do with whether you’re supposed to know what dog I’m referring to.

Something similar going on with sentences...

Kyoo wa kin'yoobi desu **ne** [*Japanese*]
today TOP Friday is **NE**
'Today is Friday, right?'

Kyoo wa kin'yoobi desu **yo**
today TOP Friday is **YO**
'Today is Friday (I assert)'

Kyoo wa kin'yoobi desu **ka**
today TOP Friday is **KA**
'Is today Friday?'

ne: 'I assume you know this'

yo: 'I believe you don't know this'

A popular model for talking about how conversation works: the Question Under Discussion (QUD) model.

QUD

Where do your professors live?

QUD

Where do your professors live?

Where does your
24.917 prof live?

Where does your
6.002 prof live?

Where does your
7.22 prof live?

....

Where do your professors live?

QUD

Where do your professors live?

Where does your
24.917 prof live?

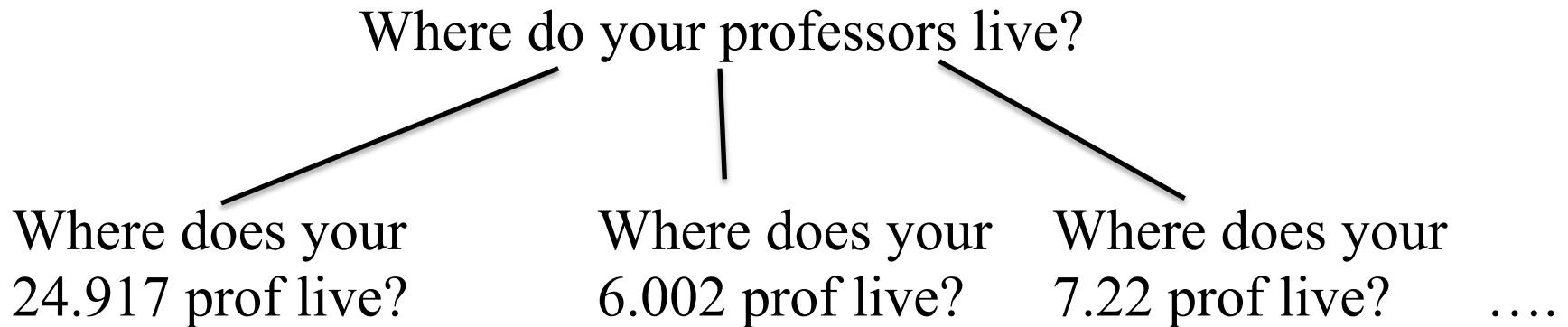
Where does your
6.002 prof live?

Where does your
7.22 prof live?

Where do your professors live?

Well, my 24.917 professor lives in Somerville...

QUD

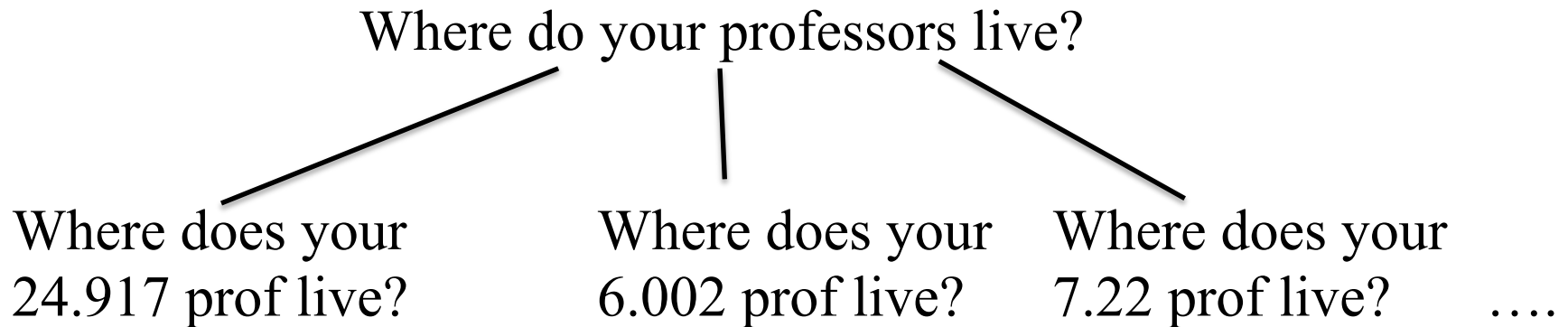


Where do your professors live?

Well, my 24.917 professor lives in Somerville...

- Oh, where in Somerville?
- How about your 6.002 professor?

QUD



Where do your professors live?

Well, my 24.917 professor lives in Somerville...

Contrastive Topic: “I have chosen to break your question down into subquestions, and to answer one subquestion. There are still unanswered subquestions, the form of which you can find by taking the phrase that I have emphasized prosodically and replacing it with other salient things.”

QUD

How'd the students do on the test?

Well, Mary passed...

QUD

- a sneaky aspect of these theories: the questions don't actually have to be *asked*. Imagine that I come into the room dripping wet; I might say:

It's raining.

...not because anyone has asked "Why are you wet?", but because I figure it might be a question on their minds.

QUD

This can lead to problems...

Imagine that I'm in your house, and all the furniture is covered with clothes. I might ask:

Are you planning to paint?

QUD

This can lead to problems...

Imagine that I'm in your house, and all the furniture is covered with cloths. I might ask:

Are you planning to paint?

It would be kind of weird if you just answer "No."

QUD

This can lead to problems...

Imagine that I'm in your house, and all the furniture is covered with cloths. I might ask:

Are you planning to paint?

It would be kind of weird if you just answer "No."

What I'm doing here is skipping QUDs...

QUD

Why are there cloths on all the furniture?

Are you going
to paint?

Are you going to
murder me?

Does your furniture
dissolve in sunlight? ...

I skipped the real QUD and asked the sub-QUD that I thought was most likely. If you just tell me the answer to that one is 'no', I'm left with a bunch of sub-QUDs that I don't understand the relevance of.

QUD

Some languages have particles that help with navigating
in the QUDs and sub-QUDs...

A: Nadine ist in Italien. *Nadine is in Italy.* *[German]*

(later...)

B: Geht Nadine heute Abend mit uns tanzen? *Is Nadine going dancing
with us this evening?*

A: Nein. Nadine ist doch in Italien. *No. Nadine is **doch** in Italy.*

QUD

Some languages have particles that help with navigating in the QUDs and sub-QUDs...

A: Hat Peter die Suppe selbst gekocht?

Did Peter make the soup himself?

B: Ja. Er hat doch den ganzen Abend daran gearbeitet.

*Yes. He worked on it **doch** all evening.*

(...and you were supposed to know that)

[German]

QUD

‘unfocused *doch*’: I am giving an answer to a previously closed QUD, and the answer is the previously given one.

There’s also ‘focused *doch*’:

A: Ist Anna zu deiner
Geburtstagsparty gekommen?

*Did Anna come to your
birthday party?*

B: Zuerst hat sie abgesagt,
aber dann ist sie DOCH
gekommen.

*At first she cancelled,
but then she came **DOCH**.*

[German]

QUD

‘unfocused *doch*’: I am giving an answer to a previously closed QUD, and the answer is the previously given one.

‘focused *doch*’: I am giving an answer to a previously closed QUD, and the answer is different from the previously given one.

QUD

A: Wie war das Wetter, als du in Rom warst?

How was the weather when you were in Rome?

B: Das Wetter war toll.

The weather was good.

A: Wie war das Essen?

How was the food?

B: Sehr lecker.

Very tasty.

A: Wie waren die Leute?

How were the people?

B: Die Leute waren sehr nett. Es war überhaupt alles sehr schön in Rom.

*The people were very nice. It was **überhaupt** very nice in Rome.*

[German]

QUD

A: Möchtest du ein Glas Wein? *Would you like a glass of wine?*

B: Nein, Danke. *No, thank you.*

A: Hättest du gerne ein Bier? *Would a beer appeal to you?*

B: Nein. Ich trinke überhaupt
keinen Alkohol. *No. I drink **überhaupt** no
alcohol.*

[German]

überhaupt: “I wish to shift from the QUD to a higher-level QUD,
and will now answer that one.”

QUD

A: Möchtest du ein Glas Wein? *Would you like a glass of wine?*

B: Nein, Danke. *No, thank you.*

A: Hättest du gerne ein Bier? *Would a beer appeal to you?*

B: Nein. Ich trinke überhaupt keinen Alkohol. *No. I drink **überhaupt** no alcohol.*

[German]

überhaupt: “I wish to shift from the QUD to a higher-level QUD, and will now answer that one.”

“Would you like a beer?”

*“Let’s now switch to the bigger question:
do I want any kind of alcohol at all? The answer is no.”*

QUD

A: Ona muxa. Ubit' ee! *It's a fly. Kill it!* *[Russian]*

B: Ona zhe uzhe ubita. *It's already killed **zhe**.*

zhe: “The sentence I am uttering is true, and you seem to believe that it is false, even though the context is one in which you have enough evidence to conclude that it is true.”

QUD

A: Kumusta?

How are you?

[*Tagalog*]

B: Mabuti. Ikaw naman?

*Fine. You **n**aman?*

QUD

A: Kumusta? *How are you?* [*Tagalog*]

B: Mabuti. Ikaw naman? *Fine. You **naman**?*

A: Sino ang mahilig sa tsokolate? *Who likes chocolate?*

B: Lahat naman! *Everyone **naman**!*

naman: “The previous QUD is now closed.”

QUD

A: Kumusta? *How are you?* [Tagalog]

B: Mabuti. Ikaw naman? *Fine. You **naman**?*

A: Sino ang mahilig sa tsokolate? *Who likes chocolate?*

B: Lahat naman! *Everyone **naman**!*

naman: “The QUD before the current one is closed.”

“ ‘Fine’ answers the previous question, and now we’re moving to the next one.”

“ ‘Who likes chocolate?’ is a question that has an obvious answer; it was closed as soon as you opened it.”

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24.917 ConLangs: How to Construct a Language Fall 2018

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