Which QuD?
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Introduction: Sluicing is ellipsis in a question, leaving only a wh-phrase overt (Ross 1969). Following Merchant 2001, we represent sluicing as involving wh-movement+TP deletion (represented via strike-through).

(1) Sally called someone, but I don’t know who [TP Sally called t].

Recent literature has converged on the need for a semantic approach to ellipsis licensing, where the sluiced question must be congruent to a Question under Discussion (QuD) (e.g. Ginzburg and Sag 2000; AnderBois, 2011; Wein, 2014; Barros, 2014; Kotek and Barros, To appear). In this talk, we highlight puzzles for such approaches, and propose a refinement where sluicing must be congruent to the most recently raised QuD. Our proposal also solves known puzzles in the literature, including Dayal and Schwarzschild’s (2010) Antecedent Correlate Harmony generalization and Barker’s (2013) ‘Answer Ban,’ discussed below.

The puzzle: How are QuDs raised, and how are they constrained? Consider (2–3) and (4).

(2) a. Sally didn’t call ALEXF.
b. # …In fact, I don’t know who Sally called t.

(3) A: Did(n’t) Sally call [Alex]t?
B: #I don’t know who Sally called t.

(4) Jack is asleep, but I don’t know in which cabin [Jack]t is asleep. (sprouting, Chung et al. 1995)

Congruence between a sluice and QuD holds when [QuD] = [sluice CP]. In the simple example, (1), the antecedent raises a QuD as to the identity of the person who Sally called. The sluiced question raises the same question — who did Sally call? Therefore QuD equivalence is met and sluicing is licensed. Following Roberts 2012, the focus structures of (2a) and (3A) presuppose the QuD Who did Sally call?, matching the sluiced question in (2b) and (3B). Nonetheless, sluicing is not licensed. Additionally, it is unclear how the QuD required for sluicing is raised by the antecedent in cases of sprouting as in (4), but sluicing is famously nonetheless acceptable.

Proposal: Not just any QuD in the discourse can license sluicing. Adopting the notion of strategy trees and super/sub-questions from Rojas-Esponda 2014 (cf Büring 2003; Roberts 2012), we propose that sluicing is licensed by the most recently raised QuD in the discourse, and not by its super- or sub-questions (up or down the tree), nor by unrelated QuDs.

(5) A strategy tree for (1):

In (2) above, the antecedent constitutes a partial answer to the QuD Who did Sally call?. In partially addressing this QuD, the antecedent raises a new QuD excluding the subquestion addressed by the antecedent, (7). This resulting QuD is not equivalent to the sluice in (2); this latter sluice is instead equivalent to the penultimate QuD that contains Did Sally call Alex? as a sub-question, (3). As a consequence, we correctly predict that sluicing is ruled out in this case.
Which QuD?

(6) QuD required by sluice in (2b):
Who did [Sally] call?
- Did Sally call Alex?
- Did Sally call Brad?
- Did Sally call Chad?

(7) QuD raised by antecedent in (2a):
If not Alex, then who did [Sally] call?
- Did Sally call Alex?
- Did Sally call Brad?
- Did Sally call Chad?

Next, the Yes/No Q in (3) is congruent to — and a subquestion of — the QuD Who did Sally call?. By virtue of A in (3) being a direct question itself, it constitutes the most recently raised QuD. This Yes/No QuD is not identical to the sluiced question Who did Sally call?. We correctly predict sluicing to be impossible.

In sprouting, (4), we propose that the antecedent raises the QuD in which cabin is he asleep? in a context with a conditional presupposition of the form: If Jack is asleep, it must be in some cabin. The antecedent affirms the antecedent of the conditional, adding the consequent proposition Jack must be asleep in some cabin to the common ground, raising the issue of which cabin it is that Jack is sleeping in. In sprouting, the content of the antecedent determines the antecedent of the conditional presupposition, and the sluiced question’s existential presupposition determines the consequent; (4) would be infelicitous, for instance, in a context where, if Jack is asleep, it must be in some hotel room.

The Answer Ban: Our proposal helps explain Barker’s (2013) ‘Answer Ban’ (8), intended to account for examples like (9). Since Jack left is an answer to the sluiced question, the Answer Ban is violated. The prosody in the antecedent presupposes congruence to the QuD Who left?. Since the antecedent answers the QuD, it is no longer active; hence the sluice is left without an equivalent QuD antecedent to license it (see also discussion in Barros 2013). In a context where more than one individual is presupposed to have left (9), however, sluicing becomes available with exceptive modifiers.

(8) The Answer Ban: The antecedent clause must not resolve, or even partially resolve, the issue raised by the sluiced interrogative.

(9) Sue left, but Mary doesn’t know who *(else) left.

The antecedent in (9) is only a partial answer to the QuD who all left?. Once the antecedent proposition is added to the discourse, a sub-question remains concerning the identities of non-Sue individuals who left. Exceptive modification renders the sluice identical in meaning to this sub-QuD, licensing the ellipsis in (9).

The Antecedent Correlate Harmony generalization: Our proposal also explains Dayal & Schwarzschild’s (2010) observation that remnant and correlate must agree on the presence/absence of a contentful head noun.

(10) Joan ate a donut.
   a. * Fred doesn’t know what.
   b. Fred doesn’t know which donut.

(11) Joan ate something.
   a. Fred doesn’t know what.
   b. * Fred doesn’t know which donut.

The most recently raised QuD in (10) is Which donut did Joan eat, and in (11) it is What did Joan eat?. Only sluices based on these QuDs are licensed, not sluices targeting a different level in the discourse tree.

Conclusion: QuDs must be constrained so as not to over-generate cases of sluicing. We propose that sluicing is only licensed by the most recently raised QuD in the discourse, not by super- or sub-questions (Rojas-Esponda, 2014, cf Büring 2003). We show how this proposal gives a principled account of recent observations concerning the nature of sluicing in the literature (Dayal and Schwarzschild, 2010; Barker, 2013).

References