

On the interpretation of concealed questions

by

Lance Edward Nathan

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ABSTRACT

Determiner phrases have the ability to act as “concealed questions” (CQs), embedded questions in sentences like *John knows the time* (i.e., John knows what time it is). The fact that *know* and *wonder* differ in their ability to embed CQs partially motivated the hypothesis (Grimshaw 1979) that verbs select the possible syntactic categories of their complements independently of selection for the semantic type of their complements. Theories of CQ meaning generally follow Grimshaw in assuming them to denote questions, or else take them to denote individual concepts (intensions of individuals; Heim 1979, Romero 2005). This dissertation argues that the former assumption does not easily describe the semantically conditioned distribution of CQs, which can be embedded under only those verbs which allow propositional complements as well as question complements. The latter assumption, on the other hand, incorrectly predicts that any DP with an individual concept meaning can be used as a CQ.

We therefore need a new theory of CQ denotations, and this dissertation proposes that CQs denote propositions, so that *the time* in *John knows the time* actually denotes the proposition that the time is x , where x has the value of whatever the current time might be. In this theory, relatively little machinery is required to restrict the distribution of CQs, and it is possible to restrict propositional denotations to only those DPs which can act as CQs, using facts about relational nouns and the composition of relative clause modification.

Thesis Supervisor: Kai von Stechow
Title: Associate Professor of Linguistics