



# addness under Discussion

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Dissertation Defense

# What can make sentences bad?

- Sentences can be syntactically ill-formed.

(1) \* Ed told Jo that he likes **herself**.

- Sentences can be contradictory, or tautological.

(2) a. # It's raining and it's **not** raining.

b. # It's raining or it's **not** raining.

- Sentences may out-of-the-blue contradict standard assumptions or expectations.

(3) ?? Jo will bring **her alligator** to the LSA.

# What is oddness?

- Sentences sometimes feel **odd** despite being informative, and perfectly “reasonable” in terms of what they implicitly assume.

Hurford Disjunction (**HD**):

(4) # Jo studied in **Paris** or in **France**. (Hurford, 1974)

Conveys: Jo studied in **France**.

- Oddness seems to come from **how** information is provided, rather than from its content.

# Redundancy

- A prominent approach to sentences like (4), is based on REDUNDANCY.<sup>1</sup>
- Both disjuncts of (4) convey the information that *Jo studied in France*.
- In fact, the entire disjunction is contextually equivalent to (5), which is strictly simpler!

(4) # Jo studied in Paris or in France.

(5) Jo studied in ~~Paris~~ or in France.

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<sup>1</sup>Grice, 1975; Horn, 1984; Meyer, 2013; Katzir and Singh, 2014; Mayr and Romoli, 2016; Kalomoiros, 2024, i.a.

# Where Redundancy falls short

- Oddness can arise despite the non-existence of a simpler equally informative alternative:

(6) ?? Jo studied in **France** or **the Basque country**. (Singh, 2008)  
Conveys: Jo studied in **France** or the **Spanish Basque country**.

- Sentences that are completely isomorphic contrast in terms of oddness (Mandelkern & Romoli, 2018; Kalomoiros, 2024).

(7) Hurford Conditionals (**HC**):

- a. If Jo studied in **France**, she did **not** study in **Paris**.
- b. # If Jo did **not** study in **Paris**, she studied in **France**.

# A new view of (implicit) questions

- The connecting thread of my dissertation is that many cases of oddness can be explained by considering that **a good sentence has to be a good answer to a good question** <sup>2</sup>
- I formalize this longstanding intuition by proposing a **compositional model of implicit questions**, which is:
  - directly sensitive to the **degree of specificity** conveyed by sentences;
  - and constrained by generalizations of **familiar pragmatic principles**.
- Under that view, assertive sentences are proposals to update beliefs, but also suggest ways to hierarchically organize such beliefs.
- You may see that as an **extension of Dynamic Semantics at the pragmatic/inquisitive level**.

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<sup>2</sup>Rooth, 1985; D. Lewis, 1988; Rooth, 1992; Roberts, 1996; Büring, 2003; Katzir and Singh, 2015; Zhang, 2022, i.a.

# Empirical advantages

- Making pragmatic constraints sensitive to both sentences and their implicit questions, captures cases like (4), (6) and (7), that together challenge standard REDUNDANCY-based approaches to oddness.
- Today, I will focus on two “Hurford” cases: disjunctions (4) and conditionals (7).

(4) Hurford Disjunction (**HD**):

# Jo studied in **Paris** or in **France**.

(7) Hurford Conditionals (**HC**):

a. If Jo studied in **France**, she did **not** study in **Paris**.

b. # If Jo did **not** study in **Paris**, she studied in **France**.

# A Bizarre Adventure into Oddness

1. Give some **background** on assertions and questions.
2. Define how **implicit questions** are compositionally evoked by assertions, and show why this is an independent desideratum.
3. Capture Hurford **Disjunctions** (4) by rephrasing REDUNDANCY.
4. Capture Hurford **Conditionals** (7) by rephrasing RELEVANCE.
5. Discuss how implicit questions could help **outside the domain of prototypically “odd” sentences**.



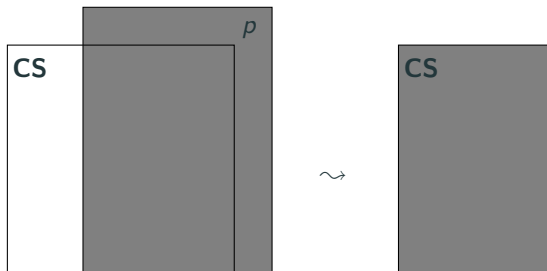


## Background on assertions and questions

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# Assertions and questions

- Assertions typically denotes propositions (sets of worlds).
- The set of worlds compatible with the premises of a conversation is called Context Set (**CS**).<sup>3</sup>
- Assertions update the CS by intersection.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>3</sup>Stalnaker, 1978.

<sup>4</sup>Stalnaker, 1978; Heim, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, i.a.

- Questions have been traditionally understood as the set of their possible answers, or “alternatives”.<sup>5</sup>

(8)  $\llbracket \text{Who did the readings?} \rrbracket = \{\text{Ed, Al, Ed and Al, ...}\}$





- Alternatives are not necessarily exclusive: if Ed and Al did the readings then Ed did the readings.
- Stronger alternatives, intuitively correspond to “better” answers.
- Given that questions are sets of propositions, how are they supposed to affect the CS?

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<sup>5</sup>Hamblin, 1973; Karttunen, 1977.

## Standard question pragmatics

- Questions induce a **partition of the CS**: just group together the worlds of the CS that agree on all alternatives.<sup>6</sup>
- The “groups” are called **cells**: they tell us which distinctions matter.

	AI	$\neg$ AI
Ed		
$\neg$ Ed		

**Step 1:** Check how each world deals with the alternatives:  defines *AI did the readings* and  defines *Ed did the readings*.

- We will only consider exhaustive and mutually exclusive alternatives, s.t. question semantics and question pragmatics in fact coincide.

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<sup>6</sup>Groenendijk and Stokhof, 1984.

# Standard question pragmatics

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- The “groups” are called **cells**: they tell us which distinctions matter.

	AI	$\neg$ AI
Ed		
$\neg$ Ed		

**Step 2:** Partition the CS by grouping worlds with the same “pattern”.

- We will only consider exhaustive and mutually exclusive alternatives, s.t. question semantics and question pragmatics in fact coincide.

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<sup>6</sup>Groenendijk and Stokhof, 1984.

# Answering questions

- Here the cells are *only Ed did the readings*, *only Al*, *Ed an Al*, and *neither*. Those are **maximal answers**.
- Union of cells, e.g. *Ed did the readings* (including *only Ed*, and *both*), are **non-maximal answers**.

	Al	$\neg$ Al
Ed		
$\neg$ Ed		

- Questions *encode* maximal answers only. The non-maximal ones can be *derived* by union.

## Constraints on question-answer pairs: Congruence

- It is widely accepted that the pairs formed by overt questions and answers are subject to constraints.
- On the semantic side, answer better be “congruent” with the question. This explains the pattern in (10).

(9) QUESTION-ANSWER CONGRUENCE (Rooth (1992)’s version).  
For a pair  $\langle Q, A \rangle$  to be well-formed, any alternative in  $\llbracket Q \rrbracket$ , must be obtainable from a substitution of  $A$ ’s focused material.

- (10) Who did the readings?
- a. ED did the readings.
  - b. # Ed did the READINGS.

## Constraints on question-answer pairs: Relevance

- Another constraint is RELEVANCE, and spells out the intuition that questions drive what sort of information their answer should convey.
  - (11) RELEVANCE (Križ and Spector (2020)'s version). An answer is relevant to a question if it corresponds to a non-maximal union of cells.
- The idea that similar constraints are at play beyond overt QA pairs, has been around for a while,<sup>7</sup> but the systematic link between assertions and questions is still poorly understood.

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<sup>7</sup>D. Lewis, 1988; Roberts, 1996; Riester, 2019, i.a.



## Preview: Oddness as question-answer Incongruence

- Recall oddness seems to arise from how information is conveyed, rather than from its content.
- I submit that this “how” is tied to which question we are trying to address.
- Oddness then arises from the interaction between assertions and the (implicit) question(s) they are trying to address.
- **An odd sentence is a sentence that only gives rise to odd questions.**

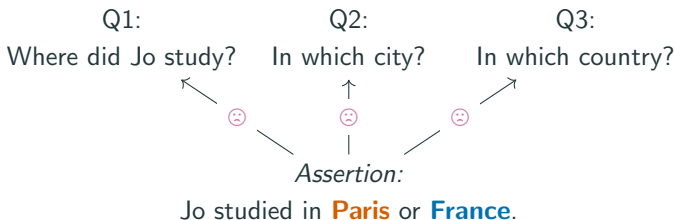


## Compositional Implicit Questions

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# Constraining assertions and their implicit questions

- If odd sentence gives rise to odd questions, then **the pragmatic module must then be sensitive to pairs formed by sentences and their implicit questions.**
- Oddness then arises when none of the implicit questions evoked by a sentence, is felicitous, given that sentence.



# A desideratum to guide our framework

- Assertions should evoke questions matching their level of specificity. This is obviously supported by overt QA pairs:

- (12)
- a. Where did Jo study?  $-\{\text{Paris, France}\}$ .
  - b. In which country did Jo study?  $-\{\# \text{Paris, France}\}$
  - c. In which city did Jo study?  $-\{\text{Paris, } \# \text{France}\}$

- Basic alternative semantics does not fully capture this: generating a question from a proposition by replacing its focused material with same-type alternatives does not guarantee that the outputs will have same specificity.<sup>8</sup>
- As a result, the evoked question may mix alternatives like **Paris** and **France**, giving rise to weird partitions.

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<sup>8</sup>Assuming alternatives must be “relevant” does not really help either: one must then explain how relevance incorporates specificity.

## Additional motivations for a specificity constraint

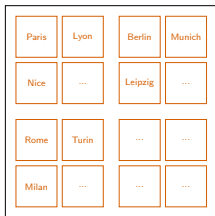
- Does question-answer RELEVANCE help achieve the specificity desideratum? Not quite: both answer in (13) are unions of cells and as such RELEVANT, yet (13a) feels too-coarse grained.

(13) In which country did Jo study?

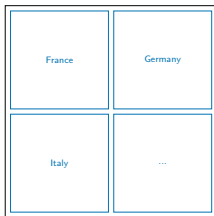
- a. # **Western Europe**
  - b. **France, the UK, or Germany**
- Intuitively, (13a) evokes a *which area* question while (13b) evokes a *which country* question, and the former is coarser-grained than the latter.
  - **We need a model of questions that encodes specificity relations between propositions – and questions themselves.**

# Questions as nested partition

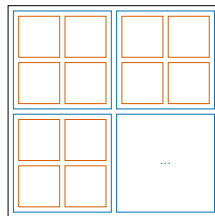
- Question are modeled as **nested** partitions. Nesting is based on specificity:<sup>9</sup> nested partitions are finer-grained than nesting partitions, meaning, **Paris** and **France** cannot be mixed up.
- A “fine-grained” question may then contain coarser-grained questions, meaning, a *which city* question structurally refines a *which country* question.



(a) By-city partition.



(b) By-country partition



(c) Recursive partition.

<sup>9</sup>Specificity is formalized in the dissertation using Hasse diagrams for  $\models$  defined on complete sets of alternatives.

## Useful notational variant: questions as Trees

- Nested partitions will be represented as **trees**. The layers of a question-tree have same specificity.
- Simplex sentences like *Jo studied in Paris* may then evoke nested “*wh*” questions-trees like 2a, or polar question trees like 2b.
- **Their deepest layers matches the prejacent’s specificity.**<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 2:** Trees evoked by *Jo studied in Paris*.

<sup>10</sup>This recipe already get us the challenging “compatible” Hurford cases like (6), (almost) for free!

# Benefits of trees beyond specificity encoding

- Implicit questions<sup>11</sup>, and question trees<sup>12</sup> have been around for a while. Ippolito (2019) even discussed how specificity differences in trees could capture oddness.
- But none of the previous approaches leveraged the expressivity of a tree model, to render the idea that **the questions evoked by a sentence, are compositionally derived from its LF**.
- This is needed if one wants to make precise predictions about logically similar, but structurally different sentences, like Hurford Conditionals.
- We now introduce a set of rules for  $\neg$ ,  $\vee$ , and conditionals, that apply to trees and **recycle longstanding intuitions about these operators**.

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<sup>11</sup>Carlson, 1985; von Stutterheim and Klein, 1989; Kuppevelt, 1995; van Kuppevelt, 1995; Ginzburg, 1996, 2012.

<sup>12</sup>Roberts, 1996; Buring, 2003; Onea, 2016; Ippolito, 2019; Riester, 2019; Zhang, 2022, i.a.



# Flagging, and “negating” Questions Trees

- When a simple assertion evokes an implicit question tree, leaves entailing the assertion get flagged; **flags track “at-issue” meaning, and are compositionally derived.**
- Negating an assertion **flips the flags** on this assertion's trees. Flag-flipping is a layerwise **complement set** operation.

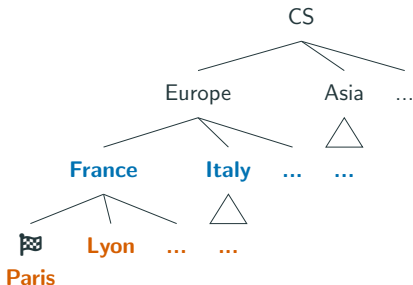


Fig. 3: A tree for *Jo studied in Paris*.

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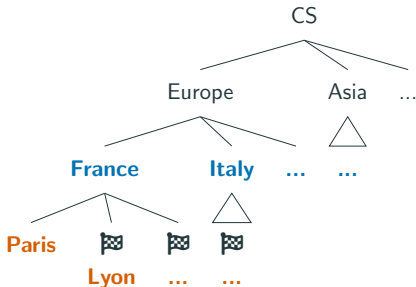


Fig. 4: A tree for *Jo did not study in Paris*.

# Disjoining Questions Trees

- Disjunction fuses the trees evoked by the disjuncts, retaining only unions that are well-formed nested partitions.
- Set of flagged nodes are also merged.

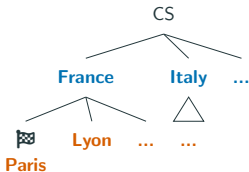


Fig. 5: A tree for *Jo studied in Paris*.

$\cup$



Fig. 6: A tree for *Jo studied in France*.

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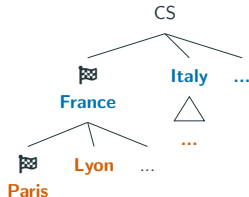
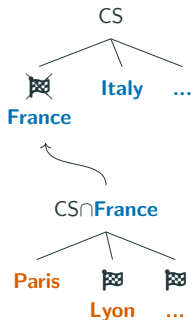


Fig. 7: A tree for *#Jo studied in Paris or France*.

# Conditional Questions Trees

- Conditionals are often taken to **restrict the evaluation of the consequent** to the worlds in which the antecedent holds.<sup>1</sup>
- Therefore, we assume that conditional question-trees raise a question evoked by the consequent, only where the antecedent holds.
- Technically, conditionals “plug” consequent trees, into the **flagged leaves of the antecedent trees** – keeping only the consequent’s flags.

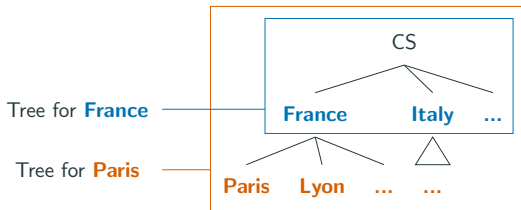
<sup>1</sup>D. K. Lewis, 1975; Heim, 1982; Kratzer, 1986, 1991, i.a.



**Fig. 8:** A tree for *If Jo studied in France, she did not study in Paris*.

## Interim Summary: expressivity

- Questions were modeled as **nested partitions**, represented as trees. Even if they look bulkier, they are just the inductive closure of an existing, uncontroversial object: partitions of the CS.
- Trees are expressive enough to capture the intuition that some assertions (e.g. **Paris**, **London**) are more specific than others (e.g. **France**), in that they evoke more “ramified” trees. **Specificity is made directly available to the pragmatic module.**



- This will be exploited in two different ways when we deal with Hurford Disjunctions and Conditionals.

# Interim Summary: transparency

- Disjunctions and conditionals can evoke different tree structures, *independently of their assigned semantics*:<sup>13</sup>
  - Disjunctive trees are formed with  $\cup$ , capturing the idea that **disjuncts answer the same global question**.<sup>14</sup>
  - Conditional trees are formed *via* an asymmetric  $\cap$ , capturing the idea that **antecedents are restrictors**.<sup>15</sup>
- This will allow us to capture the challenging contrast in Hurford Conditionals (and the absence thereof in Disjunctions) in an intuitive way.

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<sup>13</sup>This makes the current approach crucially different from Inquisitive Semantics. (Mascarenhas, 2008; Ciardelli, 2009; Groenendijk and Roelofsen, 2009; Ciardelli and Roelofsen, 2017; Ciardelli et al., 2018; Zhang, to appear)

<sup>14</sup>Simons, 2001; Westera, 2020; Zhang, 2022.

<sup>15</sup>D. K. Lewis, 1975; Heim, 1982; Kratzer, 1986.



## Rephrasing Redundancy

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# Back to Hurford Disjunctions

## (4) Hurford Disjunction (HD):

# Jo studied in **Paris** or in **France**.

- In our framework, HDs evoke well-formed unions of trees evoked by the disjuncts. We can show that there is only one possibility, the one we computed before, repeated below.

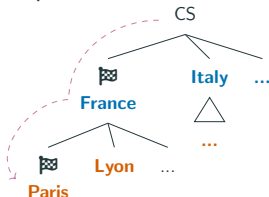




Fig. 9: A tree for #Jo studied in **Paris** or **France**.

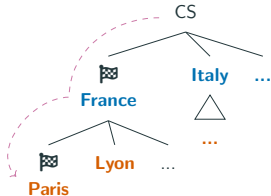
- Descriptively, the issue seem to come from the fact the  are on the same path to the CS root – i.e. **inquiring about Paris**, already settles **France**.



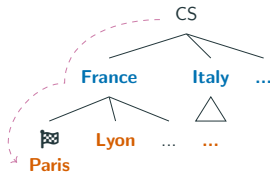
- Recall REDUNDANCY usually arises when a sentence has the same logical content as one of its simplifications.
- We generalize this to sentence-tree pairs: Q-REDUNDANCY arises for a sentence-tree pair, if **a simplification of the sentence, yields an “equivalent” tree.**
- Tree equivalence is understood as structural identity plus equality of minimal paths from the root to all .

# Capturing HDs

- The HD **Paris** or **France**, is then odd because its only implicit tree, is equivalent to a tree evoked by the **Paris**-disjunct.
- The trees below have same structure, and both only need one path, from the CS root to **Paris**, to cover all 🚩.
- We captured the idea that **inquiring about Paris, settles France** “for free”.



**Fig. 10:** A tree for #Jo studied in **Paris** or **France**.



**Fig. 11:** A tree for Jo studied in **Paris**.

## Additional remarks about Q-Non-Redundancy

- Unlike standard REDUNDANCY approaches, Q-NON-REDUNDANCY deems HDs odd due to their *stronger* disjunct; this is because Q-NON-REDUNDANCY is based on “settling” issues.
- Because Q-NON-REDUNDANCY is sensitive to the entire tree compositionally evoked by a sentence, it **captures long-distance interactions** e.g. between **France** and **Paris** in (14)

(14) Long-Distance Hurford Disjunction (Marty & Romoli, 2022):  
# Jo studied in **Paris** or **London**, or studied in **France**.

- Outside Hurford Sentences, Q-NON-REDUNDANCY covers paradigms unaccounted for by earlier approaches.
- Q-NON-REDUNDANCY being a constraint on sentence-tree pairs, it effectively rules-out trees evoked by a given sentence. It may **conspire** with other constraints, to eventually rule-out *all* the tree evoked by a sentence and make it odd.



## Rephrasing Relevance

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# The challenge of Hurford Conditionals

- HCs are isomorphic: both can be seen as  $p \rightarrow \neg p^+$  or  $\neg p^+ \rightarrow p$ , with  $p^+ \models p$  and  $q^+ \models q$ , modulo double- $\neg$  introduction and a variable change (Mandelkern & Romoli, 2018).

## (7) Hurford Conditionals (HC):

- a. If Jo studied in **France**, she did **not** study in **Paris**.

$$p \rightarrow \neg p^+ \equiv \underbrace{\neg(\neg p)}_{q^+} \rightarrow \underbrace{\neg p^+}_q$$

- b. # If Jo did **not** study in **Paris**, she studied in **France**.

$$\neg p^+ \rightarrow p \equiv \underbrace{(\neg p^+)}_q \rightarrow \underbrace{\neg(\neg p)}_{q^+}$$

- Put differently, *not* **Paris** and **France** play **symmetric** roles.

the World		
not France	<b>France</b>	
not France	France and not Paris	Paris
<b>not Paris</b>		Paris

# Describing the contrast in HCs

- (7) a. If Jo studied in **France**, she did **not** study in **Paris**.  
b. # If Jo did **not** study in **Paris**, she studied in **France**.
- Descriptively, (7a) and #(7b) only differ in:
    - (i) where **overt negation** is: having it in the antecedent triggers #.
    - (ii) how antecedents and consequents are **ordered in terms of specificity**: fine-to-coarse progressions are #.
  - Kalomoiros (2024) exploited (i); we exploit (ii).
  - This will make way for a more intuitive account, recycling the familiar concept of RELEVANCE at the subsentential level.

# An account based on specificity: core intuition

- (7) a. If Jo studied in **France**, she did **not** study in **Paris**.  
b. # If Jo did **not** study in **Paris**, she studied in **France**.
- (7a) talks about cities, in the **France**-domain defined by the antecedent. This domain fully rules out some cities, and rules in others. Nice cut!

France				
Paris	Lyon	...	Rome	...

- (7b) talks about countries, in the *not* **Paris**-domain defined by the antecedent. This domain does not fully rule out any country – it only partially affects **France**. Bad cut!

not Paris		
France	Italy	...

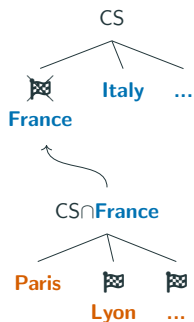
not Paris	
France	not France

# Incremental Q-Relevance

- Conditionals “plug” a tree evoked by the consequent into the flagged leaves of the antecedent’s tree.
- This plugging operation **intersects** all nodes of the consequent’s tree, with the leaf it gets plugged into.
- Intersection must be **RELEVANT** in the following sense:
  - A leaf of the consequent’s tree must be **fully retained**;<sup>1</sup>
  - A leaf of the consequent’s tree must be **fully excluded**.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Draws from D. Lewis (1988)’s and Križ and Spector (2020)’s **RELEVANCE**

<sup>2</sup>Draws from Roberts (2012)’s **RELEVANCE**

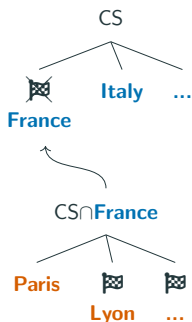


**Fig. 13:** A tree for *If Jo studied in France, she did not study in Paris*.



# Capturing felicitous HCs

(7a) If Jo studied in **France**, she did **not** study in **Paris**.



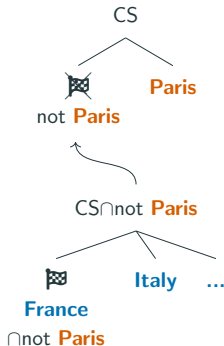
**Fig. 14:** A tree for *If Jo studied in **France**, she did not study in **Paris**.*

- A city-level tree gets plugged into a **France**-leaf.
- The leaves that remains are all French cities; this satisfies INCREMENTAL Q-RELEVANCE:
  - An original leaf, e.g. **Paris**, is **fully retained**;
  - An original leaf e.g. **Rome**, is **fully excluded**.
- (7a) is correctly predicted to be good.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>It can be shown that Q-REDUNDANCY doesn't get in the way.

# Capturing odd HCs: case 1

(7b) If Jo did **not** study in **Paris**, she studied in **France**.



**Fig. 15:** A tree for *If Jo did not study in Paris, she studied in France*.

- A country-level tree gets plugged into a *not Paris*-leaf.
- The leaves that remains are all countries, but **France** is intersected with *not Paris*.
- This violates INCREMENTAL Q-RELEVANCE, because none of the original leaves is **fully excluded**.
- What if we consider a by-city, “*wh*” tree for the antecedent instead?

## Capturing odd HCs: case 2

(7b) If Jo did **not** study in **Paris**, she studied in **France**.

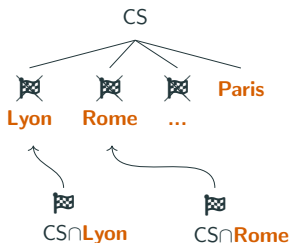


Fig. 16: A tree for *If Jo did not study in **Paris**, she studied in **France**.*

- A country-level tree gets plugged into a *not* **Paris**-leaf.
- The leaves that remains are all smaller than countries – in fact they get shrunk into city-leaves.
- This violates INCREMENTAL Q-RELEVANCE, because no original leaf is **fully retained**.
- In sum (7b) is correctly predicted to be odd.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Considering “wh” trees for *not* **Paris** and/or polar trees for **France**, gets us back into Case 1 (previous slide) or Case 2 (this slide).


## Additional remarks about Incremental Q-Relevance

- INCREMENTAL Q-RELEVANCE imposes that some, but not all distinctions introduced by the question being restricted, are retained; restriction must be faithful to the specificity of the original question, but also relevantly informative.
- The “incremental” character of the constraint piggybacks on the asymmetric definition assigned to conditional question-trees: the roles of the antecedent and consequent are asymmetric, and so are violations of INCREMENTAL Q-RELEVANCE.

## Specificity vs. negation as drivers of oddness?

- INCREMENTAL Q-RELEVANCE ends up capturing subtle asymmetries in “compatible” variants of HCs, whose oddness seems more specificity-sensitive (in a weaker sense) than negation-sensitive.
- This supports our view against Kalomoiros (2024)’s earlier view of HCs.

- (15)
- a. # If Jo did **not** study in **the Basque country**, she studied in **France**.
  - b. ? If Jo did **not** study in **France**, she studied in **the Basque country**.
  - c. # If Jo studied in **the Basque country**, he did **not** study in **France**.
  - d. If Jo studied in **France**, she did **not** study in **the Basque country**.



## **Conclusion, and Beyond the Bizarre**

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## Where we are

- My dissertation is an attempt to devise a precise, systematic model of implicit questions, and of their degree of specificity.
- This in and of itself appears to be needed to reflect deep intuitions about the dynamics of conversation.
- Existing concepts (questions-as-partitions, REDUNDANCY, RELEVANCE) were **minimally “lifted”**:
  - Partitions were made recursive in the form of question-trees;
  - Pragmatic constraints were rephrased to apply to sentences and/or their implicit trees.
- From this framework, I derived oddness contrasts between sentences that approaches solely based on LFs and propositional meanings were not powerful enough to capture.<sup>16</sup>
- Beyond the cases discussed here, the dissertation explores the interaction between implicit questions, embedded implicatures, and the overt exhaustifier *only*.

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<sup>16</sup>At the very least without under-the-hood assumptions.

# And where we'd like to go

- I have ongoing work further exploring what a model of implicit questions has to say about:
  - Repairing operators which seem to target implicit question-trees: *only, but, at least*.<sup>17</sup>
  - How implicit question may drive overttness asymmetries between competing operators.<sup>18</sup>
- But a lot remains to be explored/fleshed out:
  - Oddness in **conjunctions**;<sup>19</sup>
  - Presupposition **projection**, in relation to implicit questions;<sup>20</sup>
  - **Explicit** questions (their own implicit import; how they shape oddness<sup>21</sup>);
  - **Quantifications** (especially modals in the context of Free Choice phenomena<sup>22</sup>).

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<sup>16</sup> Hénot-Mortier, 2025b, 2025c

<sup>17</sup> Hénot-Mortier, 2025a

<sup>18</sup> Haslinger, 2024

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<sup>19</sup> Doron and Wehbe, 2024

<sup>20</sup> Haslinger, 2023

<sup>21</sup> Kaufmann, 2016, i.a.





Thank you!

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


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# Appendix

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