
Q-Binding and Conjunctive Questions

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Q-BINDING AND CONJUNCTIVE QUESTIONS*

It has been observed¹ that (1) is ambiguous:

- (1) Who remembers where John bought which books?

it can be answered by (2a) or (2b).

- (2a) Little Mort does (= *remembers where John bought which books*)
 (2b) Little Mort remembers where John bought *Cat's Cradle*, Big Rafe remembers where he bought *The Exorcist*, and Medium-sized Suzy remembers where he bought *The Bobbsey Twins at Their Wit's Ends*.

Intuitively, the NP *which books* in (1) can be read as being bound by the question-predicate *remember* (this corresponds to (2a)), or by the deleted question-predicate *tell*² (this corresponds to (2b)).

The purpose of this squib is to point out the fact that while the former reading is always available, the latter reading is only possible where the upper verb is a conjunctive question-predicate³ like *remember*⁴. The following S's have no answers like (2b).

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¹ For an excellent recent discussion of the problems engendered by this ambiguity, cf. Kuno and Robinson (forthcoming).

² That is, the source in the performative analysis, of questions (*who dun it?*) is a structure more visibly manifest in such sentences as *I ask you to tell me who dun it. Tell me* in such sentences is deleted by an independently necessary rule, and *I ask you* disappears by way of the general rule of *Performative Deletion*. (Cf. Ross, 1970, for some discussion of this rule.)

³ I refer to such question-predicates as *wonder, mystery enquire, ask, unsure, unclear*, etc. as *disjunctive question-predicates*, and such question-predicates as *odd, wild, surprise (fascinate, interest, etc.) clear, sure*, etc. as *conjunctive question-predicates*. Some of the many syntactic differences between the two classes are suggested in (i) – (iii)

(i) *As to, whether*, and *the hell* are only possible with disjunctive question-predicates:

$$\text{It's } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{a mystery} \\ \text{unclear} \\ * \text{clear} \\ * \text{odd} \\ * \text{fascinating} \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{as to how long that is} \\ \text{whether the regime will fold or not} \\ \text{when the hell Sandra will be back} \end{array} \right\}.$$

(ii) Disjunctive question-predicates exclude conjoined appositive phrases, allowing only disjointed ones:

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- (3) Who $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{wonders} \\ \text{enquired} \\ \text{wanted (them) to know} \\ \text{was unsure about} \\ \text{doesn't remember} \end{array} \right\}$ where John bought which books?

This fact is surely related to the fact *that* those dialects which allow multiple WH-questions to penetrate that-clauses only do so in conjunctive-predicate-like environments (cf. (4)).

- (4) Who $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{was (*un)sure} \\ \text{said} \\ \text{*didn't say} \\ \text{knew} \\ \text{*forgot} \end{array} \right\}$ that he had convinced who?

But how?

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It was $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{a mystery} \\ \text{unclear} \\ \text{not } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{remembered} \\ \text{known} \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$ to whom she sent it – to Jim $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{or} \\ \text{*and} \end{array} \right\}$ to Pete.

(iii) Conjunctive question-predicates (normally) take conjoined appositive phrases, optionally preceded by *namely*.

It's $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{*a mystery} \\ \text{*unclear} \\ \text{clear} \\ \text{wild} \\ \text{surprising} \end{array} \right\}$ what contains DDT-(namely) coffee $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{and} \\ \text{?or} \end{array} \right\}$ tea.

For more discussion of this distinction, cf. Ross (in preparation)

⁴ For some reason, *ask*, though it is a disjunctive question-predicate, seems to exhibit (weakly), when it replaces *remember* in (1), a (2b)-type reading. This is a meta-mystery.