Intonational meaning
the case of alternative questions

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Canonical intonation patterns

- S↑:   Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↑ coming over tonight?

- M↓:   Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming over tonight?

- Relevant prosodic features:
  - Pitch accents
  - Final pitch movement

- What is the semantic contribution of these features?

A third pattern

- This cannot be determined just on the basis of the two canonical intonation patterns!

- We must consider at least one non-canonical pattern.

- S↑:   Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↑ coming over tonight?   BLOCK

- M↓: Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming over tonight?   CLOSED

- M↑: Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↑ coming over tonight?   OPEN

Puzzle 1: answerhood conditions

Block: S↑	Open: S↑	Closed: M↓
• Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↑ coming?	• Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↑ coming?	• Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming?
• No >neither • Yes >at least one	• No >neither • #Yes >yes, what?!	• # No • # Yes
• (Yes,) Ann is • (Yes,) Bill is	• (Yes,) Ann is • (Yes,) Bill is	• Ann is • Bill is

Puzzle 2: 'exactly one' suggestion

- Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming over tonight?

  Suggests: exactly one of Ann and Bill is coming

Declarative

- <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ is coming tonight.
- No, neither of them are.

> at least one 'asserted'

Interrogative

- Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming tonight?
- # No, neither of them are.
- Actually, neither of them are.

> at least one merely 'suggested'

Syntax: focus and closure

- Block: Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↑ coming?

  [Q-is [Ann or Bill]$_F$ coming]

- Open: Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↑ coming?
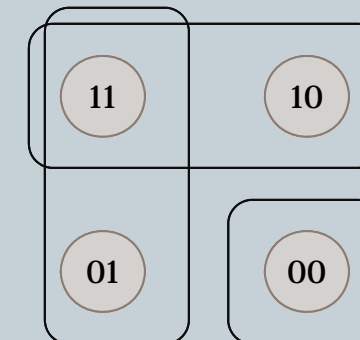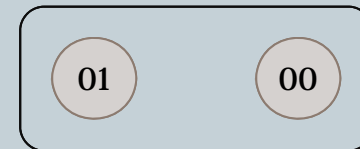
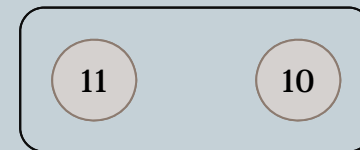 [Q-is [Ann]$_F$ or [Bill]$_F$ coming]

- Closed: Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming?

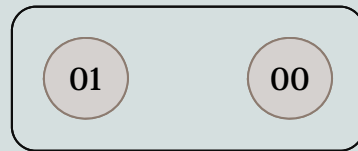 [Q-is [Ann]$_F$ or [Bill]$_F$ coming]$_C$
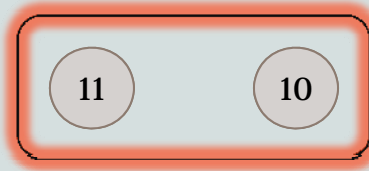
Semantics 1: proposing possibilities

- Ann is coming.

- Is Ann coming?
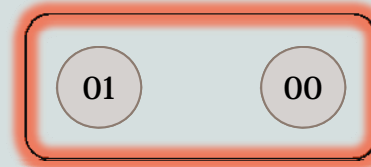
- Ann or Bill is coming.

- Is Ann or Bill coming?

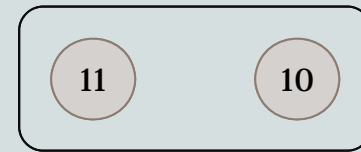# Semantics 2: highlighting possibilities

11	10

01	00

11	10

01	00

Is the door open?

Is the door closed?

Yes >**the door is open**

Yes >**the door is closed**

confirms the highlighted possibility

confirms the highlighted possibility
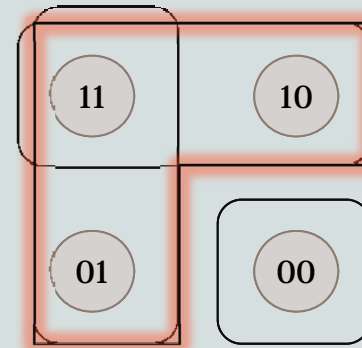
Focus, highlighting, and yes/no resolution

Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↑ coming?

- No   >neither
- #Yes   >yes, what?!

Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↑ coming?

- No   >neither
- Yes   >at least one

Yes   >presupposes exactly one highlighted possibility

          >confirms that possibility

No   >rejects all highlighted possibilities (to be refined)
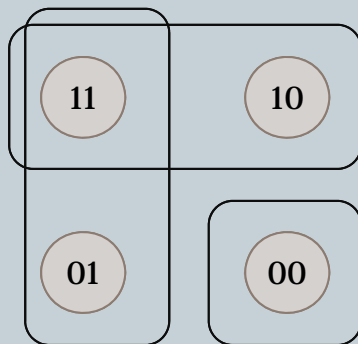
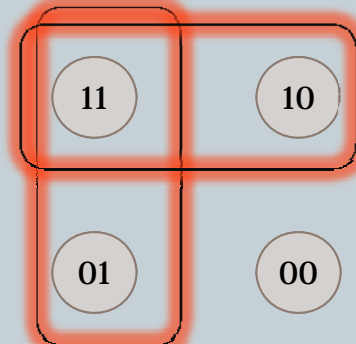# Semantics 3: closure

Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming?

[Q-is [Ann]$_F$ or [Bill]$_F$ coming]$_C$

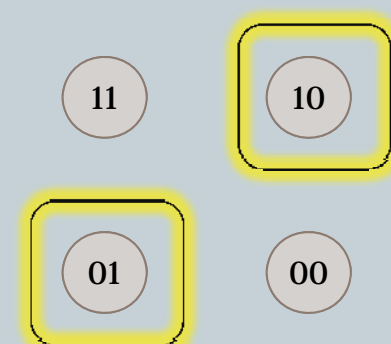Suggests: exactly one of Ann and Bill is coming

Proposes:

Highlights:

Suggests:
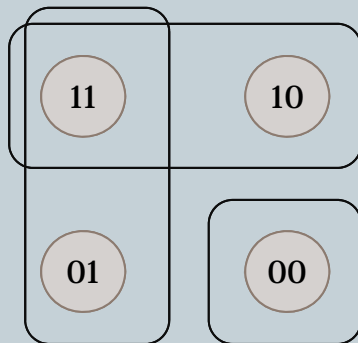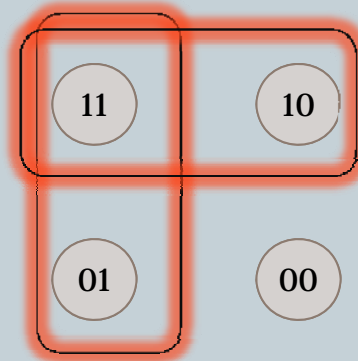
Semantics 3: closure

Generally: $[X]_C$ suggests that exactly one of the possibilities highlighted by X can be realized

So: [Q-is [Ann]$_F$ or [Bill]$_F$ coming]$_C$

Proposes:

11	10
01	00

Highlights:

11	10
01	00

Suggests:

11	10
01	00

Suggestions: acceptance and cancellation

- Suggestions can either be accepted or cancelled
- Acceptance is the default (Groenendijk, 2008; Balogh, 2009)

(1) Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming?
(2) Bill is.

> 'exactly one' suggestion accepted > Ann is not coming

- Cancellation of a suggestion is not marked with 'no'

  but with a weaker disagreement particle ('actually' or 'in fact')

(3) Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming?
(4) # No, neither of them is coming.
(5) Actually, neither of them is coming.

Back to puzzle 1: answerhood conditions

Block	Open	Closed
Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↑ coming?	Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↑ coming?	Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming?
• No >neither	• No >neither	• #No >cancel suggestion
• Yes >at least one	• #Yes >presup. failure	• #Yes >presup. failure

Yes   >*presupposes* that the question highlighted exactly one possibility
            >*confirms* that possibility
No   >*rejects* all highlighted possibilities
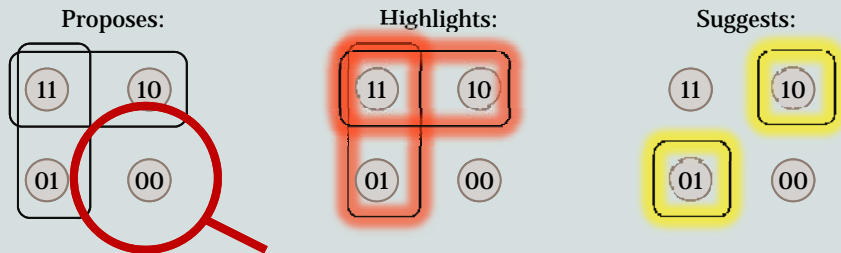   >not appropriate to *cancel a suggestion*

Back to puzzle 2: declaratives vs interrogatives

Declarative

- <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ is coming tonight.
- No, neither of them are.

at least one 'asserted'

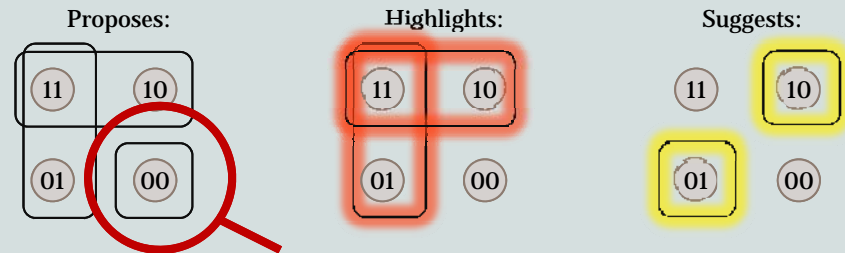## Interrogative

- Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming tonight?
- # No, neither of them are.
- Actually, neither of them are.

at least one merely 'suggested'

Back to the experiment: canonical patterns

- S↑:　　　　Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↑ coming over tonight?

　　　　　　=> YN interpretation

- M↓:　　　　Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ coming over tonight?

　　　　　　=> ALT interpretation

- **As expected**

Back to the experiment: final fall only

- S↓:   Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↓ coming over tonight?

    => predominantly ALT interpretation

- **Proposed acccount:**
  - Final fall triggers search for highlighted alternatives
  - Without such alternatives, closure is meaningless
  - Lack of alternatives triggers re-analysis of focal structure

Back to the experiment: S↑ versus M↑

- S↑:   Is <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>↑ coming over tonight?

            => YN interpretation

- M↑:   Is <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↑ coming over tonight?

            => still predominantly YN interpretation

- Explanation:
  - Artefact of the experimental setup
  - The offered YN paraphrase is compatible with the interpretation induced by S↑ but also with that induced by M↑
  - Further experimentation is needed to establish the subtle interpretive difference between the two patterns

Repercussions

- Exclusivity effects in declarative disjunctions:

(1) <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓ is coming.   >at most one
(2) <u>Ann</u>↑ is coming, or <u>Bill</u>↑, or <u>both</u>↓.   >perhaps both

- Might:

(3) Jim might talk to <u>Ann</u>↑ or <u>Bill</u>↓.   >at most one
(4) Jim might talk to <u>Ann-or-Bill</u>.   >perhaps both

- Ignorance implicatures: follow from 'inquisitive sincerity principle'

- Cross-linguistic applicability:
  Core mechanisms may apply cross-linguistically, though their 'implementation' will differ (e.g., closure may be marked by intonation/word order/morphology).