

Semantics-Pragmatics of Polar Questions

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Abstract

Polar questions are frequently used in everyday conversation. At first glance, they may appear straightforward: a speaker asks about the truth of a (propositional) sentence. However, the picture becomes more complex once we consider the wide range of polar question types, such as "*Did John come?*", "*Did John not come?*", "*Didn't John come?*", "*Did John really come?*", "*John came?*", "*John came, didn't he?*", "*John came, did he?*", and so on. Each type exhibits a distinct interpretive profile, determined not only by the polarity of the question (prejacent), but also by how the question encodes the speaker's expectation and interacts with the discourse evidence in the current context. This course investigates how scholars divide the labor between semantics and pragmatics in the study of polar questions. We will examine the felicity conditions associated with different polar questions, as well as the expected answer they trigger, with the aim of developing a nuanced understanding of the semantics–pragmatics interface in polar questions.