

4.

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I. The Facts.

It has been noted that rhetorical wh-clauses (a.k.a. *rhetorical questions*) are interpreted very similarly to negative statements involving a negative quantifier (Sadock 1971, Han 2002):

- (1) After all, what do they know
- (2) After all, they know nothing

Interestingly, like their negative-statement counterpart in (2), rhetorical wh-clauses can be selected as the complement of *because*:

- (3) Don't listen to them, because what do they know (Phil Collins lyric)
- (4) Don't listen to them, because they know nothing

This is surprising because syntactically, a rhetorical wh-clause is generally considered a CP, but CP is not otherwise selected by *because*:

- (5) ... because [_{IP} they know nothing]
- (6) *... because [_{CP} that they know nothing]

II. The Puzzle.

So we have a paradox: (7a) and (7b) indicate that *because* syntactically selects an IP and not CP (in this case both complements denote a proposition), while (8a) and (8b) indicate that *because* selects for a rhetorical CP, which is likely to denote a proposition like its negative-statement counterpart, and not an interrogative CP, which is commonly assumed to denote a set of propositions:

- (7) a. ... because [_{IP} they know nothing]
b. *... because [_{CP} that they know nothing]
- (8) a. ... because [_{CP} what do they know]
b. *... because [_{CP} what color is my hair]

A semantic account will not be able to rule in declarative IPs and still rule out *that*-clauses, while a syntactic account will not be able to rule in rhetorical wh-clauses and still rule out interrogative wh-clauses.

III. The Consequences.

Sawada and Larson (2004) demonstrate that causal adverbs such as *because* allow root-type phenomena (preposing and dislocation), while temporal adverbs such as *when* do not. They argue that this is because the complement of *because* is syntactically larger than the complement of *when*. While this accounts for the fact that *because* allows for rhetorical wh-clauses and *when* does not, it cannot predict that *because* disallows interrogative wh-clauses and declarative *that*-clauses.

Depending on whether the answer lies in the semantics or the syntax, this puzzle raises several questions:

- (i) It is likely that there is a semantic difference between the rhetorical wh-clause in (8a), which may denote a proposition, and the interrogative in (8b), which is assumed to denote a set of propositions. But is there also a semantic difference between the declarative IP in (7a) and the *that*-clause in (7b)?
- (ii) Is there a syntactic property that unites the declarative IP in (7a) and the rhetorical CP in (8a) to the exclusion of the *that*-clause CP in (7b)? Could it be that there is a syntactic property that distinguishes 'sentence' level clauses from 'non-sentence' level clauses?
- (iii) If there is such a syntactic property, how does this affect Adjunct Island effects that have been noted for causal adverbials (*because, since, although, etc.*)?
- (iv) Could it simply be that the two forms of *because* are separate lexical items?

References

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