

Alternatives and Disjunction through the lens of Disjunctive Questions in Yoruba

Anna Howell, anna.howell@uni-tuebingen.de

This talk presents an analysis of disjunctive questions in Yoruba, a Niger-Congo language. The goal is to gain a better understanding of the way disjunction and alternative semantics interact to generate alternative questions crosslinguistically. In Yoruba, alternative questions are disambiguated syntactically and morphologically: Alternative question interpretations are obtained by fronting the disjunction to a clause-initial focus position followed by the focus-marking particle *ni*, as in (1), below. Disjunctive polar question interpretations are obtained by leaving the disjunction in its base position., as in (2).

- (1) *Şe bata tabi iwe ni Kemi ra?*
Q shoe or book NI Kemi buy
'Did Kemi buy the shoes or the book?' # PolQ, ✓ AltQ
- (2) *Şe Kemi ra bata tabi iwe ?*
Q Kemi buy the shoes or book
'Did Kemi buy the shoes or the book?' ✓ PolQ, # AltQ

Building on parallels between the presuppositions of alternative questions and those found in English *it*-clefts and with Yoruba *ni*-fronting more generally, I develop an analysis of *ni*-fronting in Yoruba non-disjunctive questions that derives this presupposition via a focus sensitive maximality operator and then extend the analysis to account for the presuppositions of alternative questions, using an alternative semantic account of disjunctive questions (Beck & Kim 2006). I suggest that extending this proposal to other languages may help explain the observations that, crosslinguistically, alternative questions frequently require focus marking of the disjunction and carry similar presuppositions across languages (cf. Biezma & Rawlins 2015).

References:

- Beck, S., & Kim, S. S. (2006). Intervention effects in alternative questions. *The Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics*, 9(3), 165-208.
- Biezma, M., & Rawlins, K. (2015). Alternative questions. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 9(11), 450-468.