

Chapter 1

Non-assertive speech acts and their QUDs

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Abstract goes here

1 Introduction

Starting from the name itself – *information structure* – the notion of *information* is central in the characterization of information-structural notions such as focus and topic. Indeed, focus can be defined as the part of an utterance that contributes new information at a certain point of discourse (Halliday 1967, Lambrecht 1994, Vallduví & Engdahl 1996). A focused constituent has also been viewed as the piece of information that answers a question (a question being an information-seeking device) (Roberts 1996, Büring 2003). A topic has been defined as what the utterance is about, that is, what the utterance provides some information on (Reinhart 1981), at the same time establishing a *link* to what's already known (e.g. Gundel & Fretheim 2006, Brunetti 2009).

In speech-act theories, the notion of information is important to characterise the speech act of *assertion*. Depending on the account, the notion of information has or has not been included in the definition of assertion (see Jary 2010 for a review of the literature and a discussion); however, as Jary points out,

”[i]t is [...] legitimate – and necessary – to ask why the practice of assertion exists, and an adequate answer to this question must surely give informativeness centre stage. Assertions exist, and we are disposed to attend to them, because they are a source of information about the world beyond our

perceptual capacities. [...] Consequently, a complete understanding of assertion cannot be arrived at without considering its informative function” (Jary 2010: 10)

The correspondence between focus and assertion has also long been acknowledged (see, for instance, Lambrecht 1994, Jary 2010, Matic & Wedgwood 2013). Matic and Wedgwood report data from Saeed (1999) and Tosco (2002) on the Somali focus marker *baa*, and data from Faller (2002) on the Quechua focus morpheme *-mi/-n*. The Somali morpheme can occur in a sentence like (1) and is associated with a realis meaning. This meaning, as they say, ”is directly related to assertion, the defining feature of which is the speaker’s commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed (Jary 2010)” (Matic & Wedgwood 2013: 140).

- (1) Tosco (2002: 36)
Nin baa waa ari badan lahaa.
man BAA time sheep many had
‘There was once a man who had many sheep.’

The Quechua morpheme is part of the evidentiality system and ”(a)s argued by Faller (2002: 140), it ‘indicates that the speaker has best possible grounds for making his or her statement’, via direct evidence or otherwise” (ibid.). Again, such a meaning is related to assertion, which is a commitment of the speaker to the truth of what s/he says. Interestingly, Matic and Wedgwood point out that ”(s)ince Quechua allows for different scopes of the evidential, the veridicality claim may pertain to the whole proposition expressed by the sentence or to various parts thereof. All this has an effect of explicit marking of different scopes of assertion, much like the traditional notion of different focus scopes” (ibid.).¹

Going back to informativeness, the notion loses its intuitive appeal when the information structure of non-assertive utterances is taken into account. The notion is so closely connected to information structure that it is legitimate to ask whether non-assertive utterances can be considered to have an information structure partition at all. Clearly, it is assertions that answer questions and, therefore, come with a clearly designated focus constituent. But what about other speech acts and, in particular, questions themselves? That even they exhibit some kind of

¹Matic and Wedgwood do not conclude from these data that focus coincides with assertion. Their claim is rather that focus markers can be associated with a range of different semantic or pragmatic properties, and that the notion of focus is eventually vacuous. We will argue in this paper that the link between focus and assertion can be maintained and in fact be used as the starting point for an illocutionary approach to information structure, along the lines of Jacobs (1984), Krifka (2001, 2011), Beyssade (2017, 2013, 2006).

information partition is obvious when we examine their form: in many languages non-assertive utterances (interrogatives, imperatives, exclamatives, etc.) clearly display linguistic markings that, in the corresponding declarative sentences, are related to the identification of focus, topic, or contrast.

In English – a language that heavily uses intonation to mark focus and topic – interrogatives can bear a pitch accent, as in (2) (by convention, the accented word is given in capital letters):

- (2) Krifka (2011: 1780)
 a. Did **BILL** go to the party?
 b. What did **BILL** bring?

In Japanese, the topic marker *wa* is present in sentences realizing different speech acts. Tomioka (2009) provides the following examples, where the *wa* marker is in an interrogative, an imperative, and an exhortative sentence respectively:

- (3) Tomioka (2009: 122)
- a. Interrogative
 ... Zyaa Erika-WA/ERika-wa doko-e itta-no?
 ... then Erika-TOP/Erika-TOP where went-Q
 ‘..., well then, where did ERika go?’
- b. Imperative
 Eego-WA/EEGO-wa tyanto yatte-ok-e.
 English-TOP/English-TOP without-fail do-prepare-IMP
 ‘At least, prepare yourself for ENGLISH.’
- c. Exhortative
 Kyooto-NI-WA/KYOOto-ni-wa iko-o
 Kyoto-LOC-TOP/Kyoto-LOC-TOP go-EXH
 ‘At least, let’s go to KYOto.’

In Italian, different syntactic constructions typically related to information structure in declaratives are also present in interrogatives. Consider for instance yes/no interrogatives. In Italian, they are morphosyntactically identical to the corresponding declarative counterparts, except for the questioning or asserting intonational contour at the end (D’Imperio 2002). In (4), both the declarative and the interrogative display a clitic right dislocation (the direct object *la borsa* is moved to the end of the sentence and is doubled by a resumptive clitic pronoun), a construction that typically marks a topic (Benincà et al. 1988).

- (4) a. L'hai data a Leo, la borsa (non a Linda).
 Cl.3g.acc-have.2sg given to Leo the bag not to Linda
 'You gave the bag to Leo (not to Linda)'
 b. L'hai data a Leo, la borsa (o a Linda)?
 Cl.3g.acc-have.2sg given to Leo the bag or to Linda
 'Did you give the bag to Leo (or to Linda)?'

Wh-interrogatives display IS markings too. In (5), the object is dislocated, this time to the left, again to mark the dislocated constituent as a topic.²

- (5) Ma lo zaino, a chi l'hai dato?
 but the backpack to whom Cl.3sg.ACC-have.2SG given
 'But whom did you give the backpack to?'

In this paper we assume that all utterances - both assertive and non-assertive ones - have an information structure. In order to derive their IS, we adopt an illocutionary view of information structure along the lines of [Jacobs \(1984\)](#), [Krifka \(2001, 2011\)](#), [Beyssade \(2013\)](#). We present such a view in Section 2 below. In Section 3, we discuss some of the analyses that have been given in the literature on the data presented above. We then present our own analysis in Section 4, mostly focusing on interrogatives (and on the act of questioning). Specifically, we investigate how the QUD-based model proposed for assertions in [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#), [Riester \(2019\)](#), [Brunetti et al. \(2021\)](#) can account for their information structure, and propose some adjustments to it. We finally sketch in Section 5 how other non-assertive utterances can be analysed in a similar fashion. We eventually draw our conclusions and future perspectives in Section 6.

2 An illocutionary approach to IS

Assuming that the focus constituent in French declaratives is marked by a boundary tone ([Fery 2001](#), [Beyssade et al. 2003, 2004](#)), a correspondence has been observed between the prosodic phrasing in asserting declaratives and in interrogatives: while the former marks the focus, the latter marks the right boundary of the part of the interrogative that is specifically questioned (see (6) and (7) below).

²The topic represented by a clitic left dislocated element and the one represented by a clitic right dislocated element are pragmatically different in declaratives, for instance they have a different anaphoric link with their antecedent (cf. [Brunetti et al. \(2020\)](#) on Catalan), and they vary in acceptability if the topic is contrastive, see [Benincà et al. \(1988\)](#), [Brunetti \(2009\)](#), among many others. Whether these differences also apply to interrogatives is not clear.

For instance, while (7a), with a terminal boundary tone at the end (indicated by T%) can be paraphrased as in (8a), the question in (7b), where the boundary tone is right after *Bernadette*, is paraphrased as in (8b), and (7c), where the boundary tone is right after *sorti* 'gone out', the paraphrase is as in (8c).

- (6) **Beyssade (2006: 190)**
 Où as-tu caché ton sac ?
 'Where did you hide your bag?'
 a. (Où) (as-tu caché ton sac)
 b. (Où as-tu) (caché ton sac)
 c. (Où as-tu caché) (ton sac)
 d. (Où as-tu caché ton sac)
- (7) **Beyssade (2013: 222)**
 a. Pierre est sorti avec Bernadette hier soir)T% ?
 Pierre is gone-out with Bernadette yesterday night
 'Did Pierre go out with Bernadette last night?'
 b. Pierre est sorti avec Bernadette)T% hier soir?
 c. Pierre est sorti)T% avec Bernadette hier soir ?
- (8) a. Is it true that Pierre went out with Bernadette last night?
 b. Is it with Bernadette that Pierre went out last night?
 c. Is it to go out what Pierre did last night with Bernadette?

On the basis of these data, Beyssade and collaborators adopt an illocutionary account of information structure (Beyssade et al. 2003, Beyssade et al. 2004, Beyssade 2013, Beyssade 2017). They compare a definition of information structure in informational terms and one in illocutionary terms. The former defines background as "the part of the propositional content that is shared or inferable from the context", while the focus is "the part of the propositional content that is new in the context." (Beyssade et al. 2004: 458). In the illocutionary view, originally proposed by Jacobs (1984), focus is "the part of the content that is specifically affected by the illocutionary operator associated with the sentence" (ibid.). Beyssade and collaborators argue that the definition of focus as new information and the illocutionary definition overlap in assertions;"[h]owever, the illocutionary definition is more general than the informative one since it covers all illocutionary types of utterances." (ibid.). In (9) the same sentence, with the same IS partition into focus (*Chirac*) and background (*Mathilde a voté pour x*)

can be used to accomplish different acts, depending on the illocutionary operator: *Chirac*, which is the focus, is respectively the informative part of the sentence (Mathilde voted for Chirac and not for other candidates), the part that is questioned (did Mathilde vote for Chirac or for other candidates), it is the source of surprise for the speaker (it is surprising that she voted for Chirac and not for other candidates), and so on.

(9) **Beyssade (2013: 321)**

- a. C'est pour Chirac que Mathilde a voté.
'It is Chirac that Mathilde voted for'
- b. ASSERT < x Mathilde a voté pour x, Chirac >
- c. QUEST < x Mathilde a voté pour x, Chirac >
- d. SURPRISE < x Mathilde a voté pour x, Chirac >

In this paper we adopt an illocutionary view to information structure (IS) and tackle the information structure of non-assertive speech acts and in particular of questions within this view. At the same time, we try to maintain a QUD-based account of IS, namely an account based on the identification, through the formulation of its question under discussion, of the given-new partition of an utterance, where the new part is the focus and the given one is the background. **Beyssade (2013)** rejects the idea that focus expresses new content. What we claim is that focus does not always have the pragmatic function of *communicating* new content; nevertheless, focus is still the part of the utterance that is *new*, in that it corresponds to the utterance's fresh contribution to the discourse. Such a contribution is not limited to inform (as in assertions) but, depending on the speech act, to question, to order, to promise, to suggest, and so on.

Before proposing our revised version of the QUD-model in order to account for questions and other speech-acts, we briefly discuss some analyses made in the literature on the IS of questions.

3 Previous proposals on the IS of questions

In the literature, we can distinguish between two approaches to the definition of focus in non-assertive utterances, and in particular in questions. Roughly speaking, the first one determines focus and topic on the basis of formal criteria (prosodic and morphosyntactic marking), which are analogous to those of assertions; the second one takes the meaning of questions as the starting point

to derive the IS partition of the utterance, independently from how coherently the linguistic marking reflects such partition.

According to the first view, we may assume for instance that, just like in the case of assertions, the focus of a question is prosodically marked by some kind of prominence. In a sentence like (2b) repeated below, with an accent on *Bill*, the latter is the focus.

(10) What did BILL bring?

The second approach is based on the meaning of questions and their corresponding answers. From the perspective of question-answer congruence, adopted in various semantic frameworks like *Alternative Semantics* (Rooth 1992), the part that corresponds to the focus of an answer is its wh-element. According to this view, in (10) the focus is *what*, which though leaves the prominence on *Bill* unaccounted for (but see more on this below).

The correspondence between wh-phrase and focus is empirically supported by the identical marking of wh-phrases and focus phrases in typologically unrelated languages: either both occupy the same position, as in Hungarian, or they are accompanied by the same morpheme, as in Chinese, or they bear the same prominence, as in Romanian (cf. (11), see Eckardt 2019, Bocci et al. 2021, and references quoted in there).

(11) Romanian (Bocci et al. 2021: 415)

UNDE l' ai cumpărat?
 where it have bought
 'Where did you buy it?'

Languages also exist where such a correspondence does not hold. In Italian declaratives, the sentence nuclear accent falls on the rightmost position of the clause (Nespor & Vogel 1986, Gili Fivela, Barbara and Avesani, Cinzia and Barone, Marco and Bocci, Giuliano and Crocco, Claudia and D'Imperio, Mariapaola and Giordano, Rosa and Marotta, Giovanna and Savino, Michelina and Soriano, Patrizia 2015); since Italian has a relatively free word order and the focus constituent must bear the nuclear accent, the focus constituent usually occupies that position. In wh-interrogatives, however, the accent systematically falls on the verb (see Calabrese 1982, Ladd 1996, Marotta 2001, and more recently Bocci et al. 2021). In a wh-question like (12), the nuclear accent falls on the verb *andata* 'gone'. Notice that such prosody does not even correspond to the given-new partition of the interrogative, since *ci è andata* 'went there' is clearly given material.

(12) Italian

A: Francesca è andata a Firenze.

'Francesca went to Florence'

B: Come ci è ANDATA?

how CI-LOC is gone

'How did she go there?'

Analogously in English, as Ladd (1996) observes, the nuclear accent falls on the last constituent of the interrogative (*Where are you GOING?*), which obviously is not the *wh*-phrase.

It is well known, since earlier works like Jackendoff (1972), that prominence may also mark a contrastive topic. That is what Krifka (2011) argues for the accent on *Bill* in (13a). The *wh*-interrogative can be paraphrased as in (13b):³

- (13) a. What did BILL bring?
b. As for Bill, what did he bring?

For Krifka, what we have in this example is a "set of speech acts as alternatives", namely "the speaker, at the current point in discourse, has reasons to select, out of this set, the one speech act that is actually made." Krifka further adds that "(t)his is quite similar to the role of contrastive topics, which also occur in questions" (Krifka 2011: 1780). In an earlier paper, Krifka had already suggested that topics must stay outside the scope of speech acts: his examples showing a topic outside the scope of a question, a request, or a curse, are repeated below:

- (14) Krifka (2001: 25)
a. As for Al, which dishes did he make?
b. The hamburger, please hand it to me.
c. This guy, he should go to hell.

Taking inspiration from Jacobs (1984) and Krifka (2001), Tomioka (2009) provides an similar account for Japanese *-wa*, which, as we have seen in (3), can occur in sentences realising different acts. Tomioka assumes the existence of speech-act alternatives and proposes that the *wa*-phrase stays outside the scope of the utterance's speech act. Prominence on the *wa*-phrase triggers such alternatives.

³Beyssade (2006: 190) also suggests that in cases like (6), when the intonation marks a focus that is not just the *wh*-phrase but goes beyond it, then the interpretation is that of a question *under some condition*, which is basically what a contrastive topic does.

Within a contrastive-topic analysis of prominence in an interrogative sentence, the correspondence between the wh-phrase and the focus can be maintained. In the next section, we are going to discuss what the QUD-based model of discourse proposed by [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#) has to say about the IS of non-assertive utterances. We will first and mostly focus on questions, because they occupy a special place in this model.

4 The information structure of questions within a QUD-based model of discourse

4.1 The QUD model

It is nowadays a widely accepted claim that the information structure of an utterance can be derived via the formulation of an implicit or explicit question, of which the utterance is the answer. The idea, within the so-called "Question under Discussion" (QUD) models of information structure ([Roberts \(1996\)](#), [Ginzburg \(1995\)](#), [Onea \(2016\)](#), [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#), see [Velleman & Beaver \(2016\)](#) for a review of these models) is that each utterance pushes the discourse forward by providing a piece of information that answers an implicit QUD, which is relevant at that point of discourse, in order for the discourse communicative goal to be achieved (be it a dialogue, a conversation, a monologue, be it spontaneous or guided discourse, written or spoken).

In [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#), it is proposed that in order to reconstruct the (generally implicit) QUD of each utterance, three rules must apply, which are called *Q-A congruence*, *Q-Givenness*, and *Maximize-Q-Anaphoricity*. Q-A congruence states that the QUD must be congruent with its answer, namely the wh-phrase of the question must correspond to the focus of its answer (see also [Cruschina & Mayol 2022](#), and references quoted there). Consider for instance the example in (15), from a spoken interview by journalist Laura Kuenssberg (LK) to former UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (PM). The example is annotated according to [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#)'s guidelines. By convention, the implicit QUD is labelled Q and is numbered; the same number is given to its answer (labelled A). The indentation means that the answer occupies a lower position in the QUD tree that is built from the annotation, see [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#), [Riester \(2019\)](#) for more details on the properties of the QUD tree. Implicit QUDs are written in italics. The focus part is bracketed and labelled with F, while if a contrastive topic is present, it is labelled with CT.

The answer's focus - *about as well as could be* - is a congruent answer to Q1, which is about the manner in which things are going.⁴

(15) Interview

Q₁: LK: How do you think this is going?

>A₁: PM: Well, I think that it's going [about as well as could be]_F

The second principle, Q-Givenness, assures that the QUD only contains given material, namely which has been mentioned in the immediately preceding context. Consider (16), from a written review of BMW's car called *Active Tourer*.⁵ All linguistic material in Q1 represents content that is already given in A0, except for the wh-word *how*.

(16) Car review

A₀: BMW cheerfully tells us the 2-series Active Tourer, the company's first stab at a people carrier, is doing rather better than expected.

Q₁: *How is 2-series Active Tourer doing better than expected?*

>A₁': [The production line's running at full capacity,]_F

>A₁'': [there's an eight-month waiting list for petrol models]_F

>A₁'': and [...] it's [become the third best-selling car in the BMW range]_F.

The third principle, Maximize-Q-Anaphoricity finally guarantees that the given content is maximal, namely that the QUD contains as much given content as possible. This principle is respected to the extent to which the speaker's speech is coherent. In (16), for instance, A0 introduces a discourse topic, namely the 2-series Active Tourer's success. The QUD in Q1 asks to develop this topic, specifically by saying in what way the car is being successful. The question thus shows the coherence of what follows. A question like, for instance, 'What is going on at BMW?', would not capture enough the coherence of the subsequent discourse.

In conclusion, the principles provides a way to (locally) identify new content, which corresponds to the informative part of the utterance.

4.2 Explicit questions in the QUD model

In Riester et al. (2018), it is argued that interrogatives can function as overtly realized QUDs. Given such a special role of questions in the model, non-assertive utterances realizing an act of questioning will occupy a prominent place in our discussion.

⁴from now on, examples extracted from this interview will be labelled *Interview*

⁵From now on, examples extracted from this text will be labelled *Car review*

While explicit questions function as QUDs, they do not always follow the principles mentioned above for QUD formulation. Firstly, explicit questions may not be congruent with the answer that is given to them. Consider (17), from the Boris Johnson interview, which revolves around Brexit. The journalist asks two questions in a row, namely "How (are extra checks obtained for Ireland)?" and "Where (are they taken from)?" The Prime Minister's answer neither specifies how nor where the extra checks are obtained.

(17) Interview

LK: So let's be completely clear, under the proposals that you were about to take to Brussels, there would be extra checks on the island of Ireland, how and where?

PM: Well, I mean, if I made- the the proposals are not yet made

The PM's answer is rather a congruent answer to a question like "What about these proposals?", as shown in the QUD structure below. The beginning of the PM's response (*Well, I mean, ...*) signals an accommodation, namely that he is aware that he is uttering an incongruent answer, that he is deviating from the way the journalist, through her questions, intended to develop the discourse topic.

(18) A1: LK: [...] under the proposals that you were about to take to Brussels, there would be extra checks on the island of Ireland,

Q₂: how

Q₃: and where?

Q₄: *What about these proposals?*

>A₄: PM: Well, I mean, if I made- the the proposals [are not yet made]_F

If Q-A congruence is violated when the question is not consistent with its *upcoming* answer, Q-givenness and Maximize-Q-Anaphoricity are violated when an explicit question is not maximally coherent with the *preceding* utterance. Consider this example of the car review text:

(19) Car review

How good is the Gran Tourer at the whole MPV thing? [...]

A folding front passenger seat is an option, enabling a total load length of 2.4m, handy for skirting boards or other DIY detritus. [...]

Q₄: How easy is it to get in the rearmost seats?

>A₄: [About as difficult as most seven-seat MPVs]_F

Q4 represents a change of topic: the writer is still talking about how good the Gran Tourer is as a multiple purpose vehicle (MPV), but s/he is now addressing a new issue related to that, namely the facility to get in the rearmost seats. The writer had been mentioning the reviewed car's seats before, but the rest is not mentioned in previous discourse, so it is not given.

Maximize-Q-Anaphoricity is violated whenever the interrogative does not contain as much given material as possible. This principle seems less easily violated by explicit questions, because explicit questions usually are ways for the interlocutor to know more about the current discourse topic, so they tend to be more specific and therefore maximally coherent.

The aspect of explicit questions that most interests us here is their potential violation of Q-givenness, namely cases in which interrogatives contain new material. Indeed, it is in such cases that the question arises about how the IS of the interrogative is partitioned. We are going to discuss this in the following section.

4.3 Finding questions for questions

The QUD-based model assumes that focus is the answer to a question. Such an assumption is problematic when an utterance accomplishes an act of questioning (or any other act that is not expected after an information-seeking move, such as advising, menacing, thanking, promising, requesting, and so on). Recall that, in line with Beyssade and collaborators, we assume that focus corresponds to the part of the utterance that is under the scope of an illocutionary operator, namely that is specifically asserted, questioned, ordered, etc.⁶ In order to still capture the idea that the QUD is *answered* by a non-assertive act, e.g. by an explicit question, we propose that the QUD asks a meta-question about the speaker's act. In other words, the QUD asks what the semantic content is, which is bound by the illocutionary operator.

4.3.1 Finding questions for wh-questions

Let us see, through some examples extracted from the two annotated texts, how our proposal is implemented with wh-questions. An example from the car review text is given below.

⁶Following Krifka (2001, 2011) and partly Tomioka (2009), we also assume that a topic is the part of the utterance that stays outside the scope of the illocutionary operator. We do not follow Tomioka though in his explanation of the difference between focus and contrastive topic in terms of exhaustivity. See more on this below.

(20) Car review

A₁: So it's with less trepidation that the company ushers in this larger seven-seater version, the 2-series Gran Tourer, at a £1700 premium over the Active Tourer.

Q₂: *What does the speaker ask about the Gran Tourer and the Active Tourer?*

>Q₃: [How different]_F is the BMW 2-series Gran Tourer from the Active?

The implicit QUD in Q₂ asks what the explicit question Q₃ asks concerning the two cars. Since Q₂ is formulated according to Q-Givenness, it must mention the two cars, which are given in the preceding discourse. The explicit question asks about how different these cars are, where *how different* is the focus, namely the part that cannot be retrieved from previous discourse. Another example from the same text is (21).

(21) Car review

>A₂: Let's talk practicality.

>Q₃: *What does the speaker ask concerning the practicality of the Gran Tourer?*

> >Q₄: [How good]_F is the Gran Tourer at the whole MPV thing?

The expression *the Gran Tourer* is given, since it denotes the car that the whole text is talking about, and *at the whole MPV thing* can be considered as a paraphrase of *practicality* mentioned in A₂, so given content too. The focus is therefore just the wh-phrase *how good*.

In these two examples, where the only focus is the wh-phrase, the preceding QUD could in fact be dispensed with, since the explicit question behaves like regular QUDs, in that it is only made of given content except for the wh-phrase (it hence complies with Q-Givenness). We saw though in the preceding section that explicit questions can contain new material. In example (19), repeated below as (22), the explicit question is entirely new.⁷

(22) Car review

How good is the Gran Tourer at the whole MPV thing? [...]

A folding front passenger seat is an option, enabling a total load length of 2.4m, handy for skirting boards or other DIY detritus. [...]

How easy is it to get in the rearmost seats?

About as difficult as most seven-seat MPVs.

⁷Though the denotation of *the rearmost seats* can be inferred to be the Gran Tourer's seats.

In Riester et al. (2018), new content can be either focus or focus *and* contrastive topic. In the latter case, the QUD itself contains new material which is the part corresponding to the contrastive topic. The principle of (*Complex*) *Parallelism* (Riester et al. (2018: XXX) – which operationalizes Buring’s analysis of contrastive topics – overrides Q-Givenness and allows for the formulation of a QUD that is partly new.

In the context preceding the question *How easy is it to get in the rearmost seats?*, the writer is discussing various aspects of the Gran Tourer that contribute to assess this car’s practicality, and in particular its possible use as a multipurpose vehicle (as an MPV). Right before the explicit question, the writer is describing the fact that the car allows for a folding front passenger seat, which creates space to carry large objects. The explicit question introduces a new aspect to be considered, namely how easy it is to get in the rearmost seats. The interpretation of the question as introducing a new aspect of the more general question about how good the Gran Tourer is at “the whole MPV thing” is supported by the fact that the answer specifies that it is as difficult (to get in the rearmost seats) *as it is for most MPVs*. Given such an interpretation, this example can be considered as an instance of Complex Parallelism, as shown in the revised QUD structure proposed below, where $Q_{3,1}$ is one sub-question of the larger question about the car’s potential to be an MPV (Q_3).

(23) Car review

- > Q_3 : How good is the Gran Tourer at the whole MPV thing? [...]
- > > Q_4 : How easy is it to get in the rearmost seats?
- > > > A_4 : [About as difficult as most seven-seat MPVs]_F

$Q_{3,1}$ can be paraphrased as: “As for getting in the rearmost seats (that is, as for another aspect that helps defining or not whether the car is an MPV), how easy is it?”. The new content of the answer to this question is linked to previous discourse in that it is interpreted as part of a strategy to exhaustively answer the question about the car being or not a (good) MPV. Given this discourse strategy, by what QUD is the explicit question Q_4 preceded? As illustrated in (24), the QUD will ask what the speaker asks in Q_4 , and it will contain a wh-phrase corresponding to the part of Q_4 that the speaker asks. In addition, in this case, it will also contain a CT corresponding to the CT in Q_4 :

(24) Car review

- > Q_3 : How good is the Gran Tourer at the whole MPV thing? [...]
- > > Q_x : *As for the rearmost seats, what does the speaker ask?*

- > > >Q₄: [How easy is it]_F [to get in the rearmost seats]_{CT}?
 > > >A₄: [About as difficult as most seven-seat MPVs]_F

The presence of a contrastive topic in wh-interrogatives is made more transparent in languages that syntactically may mark a topic by left dislocating it. An example comes from the Italian excerpt of a blog interview, where the subject of Q_{24.1} and that of Q_{24.2} are left dislocated (they precede the fronted wh-phrase).⁸

(25) Italian

- A₂₃: Facciamo degli esempi.
 'Let's make some examples'
 >Q₂₄: *What do different mothers do?*
 > >Q_x: **What does the speaker ask about the mother who speaks the minority language?**
 > >Q_{24.1}: [La mamma che parla la lingua minoritaria per crescere I suoi bambini bilingui]_{CT}, [cosa fa]_F?
 'The mother who speaks the minority language, in order to raise bilingual children, what does she do?'
 > > >A_{24.1}: [Parla la propria lingua ai figli.]_F [...]
 'She speaks her own language to her children'
 > >Q_{24.2}: E [la mamma non madrelingua]_{CT} [cosa fa]_F?
 'And the mother who is not native of the language, what does she do?'
 > > >A_{24.2}: [La stessa cosa]_F.
 'The same thing'

With such constructions, the speaker signals that she is giving different examples of mothers' behaviours, namely that the explicit questions are sub-QUDs of the larger QUD (Q₂₄).⁹

⁸This annotated text is discussed in De Kuthy et al. (2019).

⁹Some scholars argue that a dislocated expression, from the point of view of discourse structure, is an independent discourse segment (Onea 2016, CASTIGLIONE??). Within that analysis, the dislocated expression is not a contrastive topic of the matrix clause, but an element with its own IS structure (in fact, an independent focused phrase, cf. the analysis of adjuncts as independent segments in Brunetti et al. (2021)). If we adopt this analysis for the dislocated elements in (24), the QUD preceding the left dislocated element would be of the type: 'What examples is the speaker making?'. This means that the dislocated element represents the more specific topic the speaker wants to talk about (it's one of the examples the speaker wants to make). However, since it constitutes an independent segment, it is also fully focused, because it answers its own QUD. This analysis brings to mind what an explicit question does too: it answers a QUD and therefore has its own IS, but it is also a QUD itself, that is a new discourse topic. We will return to the ambiguous status of questions and of other elements in Section 4.4 below.

So far we have always considered the *wh*-phrase as the focus. Indeed, if the QUD asks what the speaker *asks* when uttering their explicit question, it makes sense that the *wh*-phrase is part of the answer, since the *wh*-phrase corresponds to the answer to the implicit meta-QUD asking what is *asked* (for instance, the question asks *how*, or *when* some event happened or will happen, or *what* the identity is of some entity that takes part in an event). Pragmatically speaking, it is then intuitive that the *wh*-phrase must be the focus. Notice that the illocutionary approach makes the idea of the *wh*-phrase as the focus much more plausible. If focus in non-assertive utterances is *not* the *informative* part of the sentence, but rather corresponds to the part expressing the illocutionary act, then it is obvious that in questions it is the *wh*-phrase that expresses such an act.

As we already saw in Section 3, this conclusion is not supported by the linguistic form of *wh*-interrogatives in some languages, such as Italian or English, since the nuclear accent does not fall on the *wh*-phrase but on another part of the sentence. The Italian example in (12), where the accent falls on the verb, is repeated below, enriched with its QUD structure.

(26) Italian

A₁: Francesca è andata a Firenze.

'Francesca went to Florence'

Q₂: *What does the speaker ask about Francesca going to Florence?*

>Q₃: [Come]F ci è ANDATA?

how CL-LOC is gone

'How did she go there?'

We think that such a mismatch can be explained without discharging the idea that the *wh*-phrase is focused. What is special in *wh*-interrogatives is the fact that the focused element – the *wh*-phrase – must be fronted, while the prosodic constraint of nuclear-accent assignment in these languages requires the accent to fall on the rightmost element, as mentioned above. In a situation where the focused expression does not occupy the rightmost position, one solution is to change the word order so that the focus can occupy such a position. This is what happens in declaratives (in Italian, as well as in other Romance languages), as illustrated below, where the canonically preverbal subject occupies a postverbal position:

(27) Italian

a. 'Who arrived?'

- E' arrivato [GIANNI]_F.
 has arrived Gianni
 'Gianni arrived'
- b. 'Who opened the door?'
 L'ha aperta [GIANNI]_F.
 Cl.ACC-has opened Gianni
 'Gianni opened it'

Since the *wh*-phrase must obligatorily occupy a fronted position, this strategy cannot be used with *wh*-phrases. [Bocci et al. \(2021\)](#) propose a (syntactic) explanation of how the mismatch is solved. They assume that in Italian a) the nuclear accent must be assigned to the rightmost element that is phonologically overt and b) it must be assigned to an element that bears a (syntactic) focus feature. Given their syntactic analysis, which we will not detail here, and the way they account for the spreading of the focus feature, in *wh*-interrogatives it is the verb – rather than the *wh*-phrase – that satisfies both conditions and is therefore accented. In French, *wh*-in-situ is possible and indeed [Beyssade \(2006\)](#) argues that when the *wh*-phrase is in-situ, the question must continue the current discourse topic, which means that it is not a question containing new material, and the *wh*-phrase is its only focus (cf. the focused *come* in Italian in (26)).

4.3.2 Finding questions for yes/no-questions

Let us now consider yes/no questions. If the yes/no question does not bear any particular prominence, then the whole proposition is under the scope of the questioning operator. Consider (28). The preceding QUD is therefore a general one (*What does the speaker ask?*, cf. Q₄).

(28) Interview

- PM: What we've got, basically, is a situation in which the people voted for leaving the EU in the greatest expression of popular will in favour of any party or proposition in history. And, yes, there are many people in all sorts of positions, who don't think that was the right way to go. And I am tasked with getting it over the line, getting Brexit done by October 31. And I think we always knew that as we came up to that deadline, things would get choppy, but...
- >Q₄: *What does the speaker ask, given what the PM did?*
- > >Q₅: LK: So you are blaming all of your woes on people who are trying to stop Brexit?
- > > >A₅: PM: No

If some prominence is present, then there are two possibilities. The first one is, as Krifka (2001) suggests, to analyse the prominence as a contrastive-topic marking (see discussion in Section 3, examples (13) and (14)). Consider (29).

(29) English

A: Where did Bill and John go last night? Did BILL_{CT} go to Anna's PARTY?

B: No, he went to the cinema.

Clearly, the yes/no question here is a sub-question that contributes to answer the larger preceding question concerning the place where Bill and John went, so *Bill* is the contrastive topic and *Anna's party* is the sentence focus. Notice that there is also an accent on *party*. In an example like (30), on the contrary, the preceding question asks who went to Anna's party, and the yes/no-question suggests one possible answer (*Bill*). B's reply confirms such an interpretation. Therefore, *Bill* must be interpreted as the sentence focus, and the material following *Bill* should be deaccented.

(30) English

A: Who went to Anna's party? Did BILL_F go (there)?

B: No, JOHN did.

In sum, it seems to us that an accent in a yes/no-question can be interpreted either as a focus or as a contrastive topic. Crucially, however, we expect that if the latter holds, then another element constitutes the focus (and supposedly bears focal prominence). In other words, we do not assume that a contrastive topic can occur without a focus. Indeed, given our definition of focus as the part of the utterance that realises the speech act, no utterance can be without a focus.

An empirical problem for this view is that in some languages, like Japanese, there exist sentences where no other markings apart from the contrastive-topic seem to be present. Tomioka (2009) accounts for such cases by making a difference between prominence with and prominence without *wa*-marking. He adopts an Alternative semantics framework and assumes that a phrase that bears prominence triggers alternatives. If the phrase is not marked by *-wa*, the alternatives are focus ones, while if the phrase is marked by *-wa*, then the alternatives are contrastive-topic ones and they operate on speech acts. This difference leads to an interpretive difference: alternative speech acts convey a sense of incompleteness that (propositional) focus alternatives do not convey. For instance, (31) makes the hearer suspect that the speaker may know more than what s/he states but does not wish to communicate more. With the suffix *-ga* instead of *-wa*, this effect does not arise.

- (31) Japanese (Tomioka 2009:8)
 A: Who passed?
 B: KEN-wa/Ken-WA ukat-ta
 Ken-TOP pass-PST
 '(At least) Ken passed'

It is not completely clear to us how the exhaustivity of the focus alternatives and the non-exhaustivity of the topic alternatives are derived in Tomioka's work. Also, the link is not clear between the topic function of the *wa*-phrase and the fact that the alternatives are speech acts. Tomioka makes a link between the *high position* of the topic phrase and such interpretation, but no link is made with the *pragmatic function* of the *wa*-phrase as a topic. In fact, it is not clear what a topic eventually is in Tomioka's analysis.

We would like to suggest an alternative account, which instead makes such a link. Assuming that a *wa*-phrase is a topic, and that a topic is a referent inside the background, then a *wa*-phrase must be part of the QUD. Prominence on the *wa*-phrase signals that the topic is, unexpectedly, new. That means that a complex discourse strategy is at stake. In (31), in order to answer the question *Who passed?*, the speaker decides first to answer the question *What did Ken do?*, where *Ken* denotes one of the relevant individuals in the context that might or not have passed. *Ken* has not been mentioned before, but still it is part of the question. The answer to *What did Ken do?* is not exhaustive in that it does not allow to exhaustively answer the explicit question *Who passed?*, because only the answer to all questions of the same set (*What did x do?*) would lead to know who passed. Lack of exhaustivity is therefore just an effect of the fact that the discourse strategy used by the speaker is not to answer *Who passed?* but to answer a different question about a specific member (*Ken*) of the set of possible individuals who passed (*What did Ken do?*).

- (32) Japanese (Tomioka 2009:8)
 Q₁: Who passed?
 >Q₂: *What did Ken do?*
 > >A₂: B: [KEN-wa/Ken-WA]_{CT} [ukat-ta]_F
 Ken-TOP pass-PST
 '(At least) Ken passed'

A problem with this analysis is that it would predict a focal accent on the verb 'passed'. According to Tomioka (and the references he quotes) the prosody of (31) is identical to that of the same sentence with *-ga*, namely the accent on *Ken* is a

focal accent followed by post-focus reduction. While a detailed study of Japanese data would be necessary to fully challenge Tomioka's analysis, we can at least say that our QUD-model straightforwardly accounts for the lack of exhaustivity, simply by the fact that the *wa*-phrase is part of the background and therefore of a QUD.

Our account is in line with other QUD-based analyses of similar IS phenomena. Basically the same analysis is for instance found in Marandin (2010) to explain (again) the lack of exhaustivity in a totally different phenomenon: the preverbal subject position of Portuguese sentences in contexts where a postverbal position would be expected. Following Beysade et al. (2004), Marandin "links the notion of given content to that of discourse topic" (Marandin 2010: XXX), where the discourse topic "is defined by a question (the question under debate)" (ibid.). We can update such a definition in QUD terms by simply saying that given content corresponds to the content of the QUD (cf. Q-Giveness), and that the discourse topic is basically the current QUD (see more on the function of QUDs as discourse topics in Section 4.4). As Marandin says, "[a]n utterance develops the DT [= Discourse Topic; in our terms, the QUD] when it resolves the question under debate at the moment of utterance; that is, it conveys a proposition that belongs to the denotation of this question." (ibid.). Marandin discusses Portuguese examples like (33), where the subject *Joana* answers the question *Who ate the cake?* and therefore is expected to occupy a postverbal (focused) position. Ambar (1999), quoted by Marandin, explains the contrast between (33b) and (33e) in terms of exhaustiveness, as Tomioka (2009) does for Japanese: the preverbal subject in (33e) would be a non-exhaustive focus and for that reason it would occupy a preverbal position.

(33) Portuguese (Marandin 2010: 329, taken from Ambar 1999: 27)

- a. Who ate the cake?
- b. (A tarte) *comeu a Joana.*
the cake ate the Joana
'Joana ate it'
- c. #A Joana *comeu (a tarte).*
the Joana ate the cake
- d. # (A tarte) *comeu a Joana (about the others I do not know).*
- e. A Joana *comeu (about the others I do not know).*
the Joana ate
'Joana ate it'

Marandin observes that "the opposition exhaustive vs non exhaustive focus only partially characterizes the effect associated with this type of utterance and leads to an inadequate explanation. After all, the answer may be complete with regard to the question [...] since in the context, Joana may be the only one who ate the cake. It remains incomplete with regard to the DT [=Discourse Topic] initiated by the question: The respondent has more to say about the cake or the eating of the cake or the persons related to the cake and its eating." (Marandin 2010: 347) The same could be said about the Japanese example in (31). In our QUD representation, the difference between (33 b) and (33 e) is in the QUD that precedes them: while the sentence with a postverbal subject answers the question *Who ate the cake?*, the sentence with a preverbal subject answers a different question: *What did Joana do?*, which is a member of a set of questions of the type *What did x do?*, as seen for (31).

(34) Portuguese

Q3: Who ate the cake?

>Q4: *What did Joana do?*

> >A4: A Joana comeu (about the others I do not know).

the Joana ate

'Joana ate it'

The incompleteness effect again is explained as the result of the fact that the speaker, as Marandin puts it, "considers several instantiations of the focal variable, along with several instantiations of the variable (or variables) introduced in the collection of questions that define the discourse topic". In (34), the "collection of questions" would be as in (35):

(35) {*What did Joana do?*, *What did Pedro do?*, *What did Maria do?*, ... }

Therefore, *What did Joana do?* is one of the possible questions that can be asked at that point of discourse, and the others are pending questions that could be addressed too.

The Portuguese data support our analysis in terms of a complex QUD structure, because they clearly show that the subject *Joana* is not a focus: instead of occupying an expected postverbal – hence focused – position, it occupies a preverbal – typically topic – one. The accent – and its focus interpretation – falls on the verb (cf. Ambar 1992, Ambar 1999, Soares 2006).

4.3.3 On the special status of explicit questions in discourse

Recapitulating the analysis of explicit questions presented above, an explicit question "answers" its own QUD, which is obtained in the same way as for assertions, namely by following the principles proposed by Riester et al. (2018). The explicit question is targeted by a meta-QUD, which asks the content of the speech act that the question realizes; in other words, the meta-QUD asks *what it is asked* by the explicit question. By formulating the QUD that precedes the explicit question, a given-new partition is derived, and like in assertions, new content corresponds to the focus part, or the focus part plus a contrastive topic, as discussed in Section 4.3.1.

At the same time, an explicit question is a QUD, that is, it sets a new *discourse topic* (cf. Beyssade et al. 2004, Marandin 2010). This function is particularly clear if we look at the car-review text. This text is not a dialogue (it is written); yet, it contains several questions, which are answered right away. These questions cannot have an information-seeking role, since the writer is the one who answers them. The question's role seems rather that of introducing a new discourse topic about the qualities or defects of the reviewed car, which the writer develops in the utterances that follows the question (and which constitute its answer).

In summary, an explicit question has a double status: it "answers" its own QUD and therefore is divided into given and new material, but it also functions as a QUD itself, so as a discourse topic.

5 Other speech acts

Given the scope of this paper, in this section we will only give a rapid sketch of how the proposal could apply to non-assertive utterances that are not questions.

In principle we do not see any obstacle in analysing the new-given partition of such utterances in the same way as we have analysed the new-given partition of questions. Let us start with imperative sentences. The constructed Italian imperative in (36a) is pronounced out of the blue, and the direct object *i denti* 'the teeth' is in its canonical postverbal position, right after the verb. In (36b), where teeth have been mentioned in the immediately preceding utterance, the direct object is right dislocated, and a resumptive pronoun is added (-*li*):

(36) Italian

- a. Vai a lavarti i denti!
go to brush the teeth
'Go brush your teeth !'

- b. *Daughter*: Non mi piacciono i miei denti.
 ‘I don’t like my teeth’
Mother: Vai a lavarte-li, i tuoi denti!
 go to brush-Cl.PL the your teeth
 ‘Go BRUSH your teeth!’

In (36a), the whole proposition is under the scope of the illocutionary operator, so the QUD preceding the imperative is as follows (taking for granted that the mother’s speech act is an order):

- (37) Q_1 : *What does the speaker order?*
 >A₁: [Vai a lavarti i denti!]_F
 ‘Go brush your teeth!’

If the imperative sentence is made of given content, as it is in (36b), then the QUD must contain it, as shown in the QUD structure below:

- (38) Non mi piacciono i miei denti.
 ‘I don’t like my teeth’
 Q_1 : *What does the speaker order, concerning the addressee’s teeth?*
 >A₁: [Vai a lavarte-li]_F, i tuoi denti!
 go to brush-Cl.PL the your teeth
 ‘Go BRUSH your teeth!’

In these examples, the imperative differs from the previously analysed interrogatives in that the sentence is inserted in the discourse structure as an A(nswer), while interrogatives have a special discourse-structuring role and are used as QUDs themselves. If we look at naturalistic data, however, we notice that the discourse role of imperative utterances may vary, depending on their form. Both the car-review text and the interview for instance contain imperatives introduced by *let us* and a verb of saying.

- (39) Car review
 Let’s talk practicality.
 How good is the Gran Tourer at the whole MPV thing?
- (40) Interview
 PM: And the most complex thing is clearly trying to unravel our relationship with the EU customs union and the EU single market, and the empire of the EU law as it were.
 LK: Let’s talk about that.

These utterances clearly seem to introduce a new discourse topic, like explicit question do. Indeed, they are invitations for the addressee to engage with the speaker in a new topic of conversation, be it a real invitation to a visible addressee, as in the spoken Interview, or a metaphorical invitation to a potential reader, as in the written Car-review text. We can see this kind of utterances as functioning in a similar way as a focus does when it introduces a new referent. The referent is then resumed as a topic in the subsequent utterance, cf. *a wizard* in Lambrecht's example below:

- (41) Lambrecht (1994: 177)
Once there was a **wizard**. He was very wise, rich, and was married to a beautiful witch.

Analogously, at the discourse level, a discourse topic is introduced via a special utterance (an explicit question, or an imperative like (39) and (40)) and then this topic is discussed in the chunk of discourse that follows. For instance in (39), *practicality* is the new discourse topic, about which the writer talks in the text that follows. The resulting QUD structure is given below. A14 could be paraphrased as a question: *What about practicality?*

- (42) Q₁₄: *What does the speaker suggest to do, concerning the car that is being reviewed?*
>A₁₄: Let's [talk practicality.]_F
>Q₁₅: *What does the speaker ask about practicality?*
> >Q₁₆: [How good]_F is the Gran Tourer at the whole MPV thing?

The exact linguistic properties that make an imperative function as a QUD will have to be further explored. In the Italian example in (25), for instance, *Facciamo degli esempi* 'Let's give some examples' seems to have a discourse-topic introducing function as well, despite the absence of a verb of saying.

Let us now briefly look at exclamations. Exclamatives are practically absent in the naturalistic data that we analyzed. Yet, we can at least suggest the same analysis as above, using a constructed example of a wh-exclamative in Italian. The QUD of an exclamative will ask for the speaker's feelings towards the (re-constructed) given content (cf. Q2 in ()).

- (43) A₁: – You know, the boys have come back.
Q₂: *What are the speaker's feeling about their return?*
>Q_{2.1}: *What are the speaker's feelings about the return of some of them?*
> >A_{2.1}: – [Degli altri]_{CT} [non mi importa,]_F

'I don't care about the others'

>Q_{2.2}: *What are the speaker's feelings about Leo's return?*

> >A_{2.2}: ma [Leo]_{CT}, [come sono contenta]_F che sia tornato!
 but Leo how am happy that is back

'But Leo, how happy I am he came back!'

To conclude, this section has sketched a tentative analysis of non-assertive, non-questioning utterances within the same lines as the analysis proposed in the previous sections for questions. The latter is in its turn an application with minor (but important) adjustments of the QUD-based analysis of the IS of assertions proposed in [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#) and following related papers. While [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#)'s principles and the adjustments that we have proposed in order to apply them to questions seem to smoothly also apply to other non-assertive utterances, the exact role of these utterances in the discourse structure – whether they have a discourse-topic (that is, QUD) role like explicit questions do, or not – is less obvious and needs a future study on its own.

6 Conclusions and future perspectives

In this paper we have adopted an illocutionary approach to information structure, such that the focus of an utterance is the part that is under the scope of an illocutionary operator and the topic what stays outside of it. This approach has been around for some time ([Jacobs 1984](#), [Krifka 2001, 2011](#), [Tomioka 2009](#), [Beysade 2013](#)) but we have the feeling that the literature still tends to ignore it, probably because of the little attention that is generally being paid to the IS of non-declarative sentences. Within an illocutionary approach, we have mainly analyzed interrogatives, or better non-assertive utterances that realize an act of questioning. Indeed, questions are particularly interesting in that they contribute to the structuring of discourse. In other words, they have the same function as implicit questions have within QUD-based models of discourse.

We have adopted [Riester et al. \(2018\)](#)'s model of QUD and IS structure annotation and we have applied their rules to reconstruct QUDs to explicit questions. In other words, we have proposed that an explicit question too is preceded by a QUD, and in order to maintain the idea that the QUD is actually *answered* by the explicit question, we have proposed that the QUD asks a meta-question on the content of the illocutionary act (of questioning). The QUD basically has the form: *What is the speaker asking...?*. In this way, QUDs can also precede questions, and thus reveal their given-new partition. The notion of information, which is crucial in information-structure studies, only captures the function of new content

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