

Decomposing Questions Acts

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German *wieder* ('again') has several uses that have not been discussed in much detail as Klein (2001) points out. One puzzling use that I have not seen discussed even by Klein is that of *wieder* in questions (as far as I can tell, *nochmal* displays the same range of uses). Consider example (1):

(1) Wie war wieder ihr Name?
How was again your name

It seems that *wieder* in (1) has a reading, that is absent from the corresponding declarative in (2). (2) has two interpretations: One interpretation requires a namechange: my name used to be Uli at some point in the past, then I had a different name for a while, but now I went back to Uli. Secondly, (2) has an interpretation, where it states that somebody earlier in some salient sequence (not necessarily temporal), also had the name Uli. Focus disambiguates between these two interpretations. While the former requires focus on 'Uli', the latter requires focus on 'mein'.

(2) Mein Name ist wieder Uli.
my name is again Uli

The question in (1) allows an interpretation that corresponds to neither of these interpretations of (2): (1) does not presuppose that the person addressed has changed his name or that there is another person with the same name. I suspect that this interpretation involves an interpretation of *wieder* at the speech act level.

One initial indication of this speech-act nature comes from its cooccurrence with *denn*. Krifka (2001) discusses the German particle *denn* as a speech act particle. *Denn* naturally co-occurs with *wieder* as in (3).

(3) Wie war denn wieder ihr Name?
How was denn again your name

Secondly the use of *wieder* in (1) and (3) seems to indicate prior knowledge of the answer to the question. It would not be natural to ask (1) or (3) to someone who you meet for the first time.

However, it is also inaccurate to scope *wieder* over the question act as in (4): If anything, this would require that the speaker have asked the addressee the same question before (I adopt here the question operator *Quest* from Krifka 2001).

(4) wieder(Quest(Wie war Ihr Name))

Rather it seems sufficient that the speaker just knew the answer to the question at some time in the past. (1) does not presuppose a prior speech act.

Interestingly, the question act patterns with the complex *want to know* in (5) rather than *ask* with (6): (5) just like (1) does not require a prior question act, while (6) does.

(5) Er möchte wieder wissen, wie Sie heißen.
he wants again know how you are named

(6) Er fragt wieder, wie Sie heißen.
he asks again how you are named

For questions acts, the facts seem to indicate the following: The reading of *wieder* in questions involves the speaker, but it does not presuppose a prior speech act. Therefore, examples like (2) seem to require a decomposition of the question act into two parts. I would still like to know, though, which of the various proposals (Truckenbrodt (2004) and references there) are actually compatible with facts like (2) and how other properties of speech acts interact with such a proposal and with other properties of questions.

In particular, the data in (7) are still puzzling: In a situation that brings out the interpretation of *wieder* mentioned above, *wieder* prefers to occur in front of the subject quantifier rather than following it.

(7) Situation: A waiter forgot the order of each person at the table. He asks:

- a. Was hat nochmal/wieder jeder bestellt?
What has again everyone ordered
- b. ?Was hat jeder nochmal/wieder bestellt?
What has everyone again ordered

The control in (8) shows that with a non-quantificational subject either order is acceptable.

- (8) a. Was hat nochmal/wieder Manfred bestellt?
What has again Manfred ordered
- b. Was hat Manfred nochmal/wieder bestellt?
What has Manfred again ordered

References

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- Truckenbrodt, H.: 2004, 'Zur Strukturbedeutung von Interrogativsatzen', *Linguistische Berichte* **199**.