



# A typology of non-selective interrogative pronominals: formal and functional differentiation and issues in diachrony

# Non-selective interrogative pronominals (NIPs): ‘who?’ & ‘what?’

- (1) a. *Who* is that man over there?  
b. *Who* gave you this?
- (2) a. *What* is this thing you have in your hand?  
b. *What* fell out of his bag?

vs. **selective** interrogative pronominals (SIPs), such as *which one?*

**What can be interesting about NIPs?**

(besides their syntax)





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# What's interesting: semantics

- In English, both *who?* and *what?* can be used in questions about a person

# Semantics & cross-linguistic diversity

- Russian vs. Standard Average European:
  - only ‘who?’ about a person
  - but ‘who?’ also about animals (even insects...)
- Grammars are usually silent on the semantics of the NIPs  
(actually, they tend to be misleading about it: abuse of the label “**animate**”)

# Formal differentiation

- Why do we (English, Russian, Chinese...) actually have two different NIPs ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ after all?
  - questions are asked about something we don’t know, so why make it more difficult to ourselves than it has to be?
  - although common, this differentiation is actually not universal

## Formal differentiation: less distinctions

- $\approx$  5-7 % of the world's languages do not make the distinction (based on the sample of ca. 1850 languages)

Poitevin French (Mineau 1982:255 via Rottet 2004:173)

- Qui* *qu'est venu?*  
**who** that-is come  
'Who came?'
- Qui* *qu'tu manges?*  
**what** that-you eat  
'What are you eating?'

**NB:** Similar situation in Middle and Classical French (13<sup>th</sup> to 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and several North American French creoles.

## Formal differentiation: less distinctions

Modern French attributive *quel* ‘which, what (kind of) [N]?’  
vs. predicative *quel* ‘what/who [is N]?’

a. *quel est cet arbre?*

IPW.M.SG is DEM.M.SG tree[M.SG]

‘What tree is this/that? (lit.: ‘What is this/that tree?’)’

b. [A: *Vous me conterez tout cela. Je m’attends bien à du nouveau; mais en vérité je n’en veux pas encore. Comme ce lavoir est petit! autrefois il me paraissait immense; j’avais emporté dans ma tête un océan et des forêts, et je retrouve une goutte d’eau et des brins d’herbe.*]

*Quelle est donc cette jeune fille*

IPW.F.SG is PTCL DEM.F.SG young.F.SG girl[F.SG]

[*qui chante à sa croisée derrière ces arbres?*]

[B: *C’est Rosette, la soeur de lait de votre cousine Camille.*]

## **...less than expected distinctions**

- NIPs are commonly defective with respect to the morphosyntactic categories typically available for nominals in a given language:
  - no plural marking and/or agreement
  - no gender marking on the NIP and/or no variability of gender assignment
  - defective and/or reduced case paradigms
  - limitations on the accessible syntactic slots
  - etc.

# Formal differentiation: more distinctions

- a few languages make more distinctions

Tucano (Eastern Tucanoan; Brazil & Colombia;  
Ramirez 1997:328-332)

*noá* ‘who? (human SG or PL)’

*yẽ’é* ‘what? (inanimate SG or PL)’

*yamí* ‘what? (non-human AN.M.SG)’

*yamó* ‘what? (non-human AN.F.SG)’

*yamârã* ‘what? (non-human AN.PL)’



How can we define an NIP  
for purposes of cross-linguistic comparison?

1. N + I + P

# Pronominal

- a morphologically non-bound substitute of a nominal, which itself does not need to be a nominal
  - **substitute**: the interrogative pronominal X is used to inquire about a certain referent, which in the answer to the question will be expressed by the nominal Y.

NIPs are a kind of **suspensive pronominals** (“pronomes suspensifs”, van den Eynde & Mertens 2003:70), since their referential specification is suspended

English attributive *which [N]?*, *what [N]?*

~~NIP~~

# Pronominal

- **morphologically-bound**

Tapanta Abaza (Northwest Caucasian; Russia)  
bound interrogative root *-a*

~~NIP~~

a. *wə-z-zə-pšʃa-wa-j-a?*

2SG.M[S]-PTCP.OBL-APPL-look-PTCP.IPFV-3SG.NON<HUM>.S-IPW

‘What are you looking for? (lit.: ‘The one that you are looking for, it is who/what?’)’

b. *wə-z-zə-pšʃa-wa-d-a?*

2SG.M[S]-PTCP.OBL-APPL-look-PTCP.IPFV-3SG.HUM.S-IPW

‘Who are you looking for? (lit.: ‘The one that you are looking for, s/he is who/what?’)’

Indo-European bound interrogative roots

*\*k<sup>w</sup>i-*, *\*k<sup>w</sup>o-*, *\*k<sup>w</sup>e-*, *\*k<sup>w</sup>a-*

~~NIP~~

# Pronominal

- a morphologically non-bound substitute of a nominal, which **itself does not need to be a nominal**
  - conventionalized nominal phrases:

Ewe *àmé ka* ‘who?, which/what person?’  
and *nú kà* ‘what?, which/what thing?’ (*àmè*  
‘person’, *nú* ‘thing’ and *ka* ‘which  
[N]?, what [N]?’; Niger-Congo, Kwa; Ghana;  
Pasch 1995:79)



# Pronominal

- a morphologically non-bound substitute of a nominal, which **itself does not need to be a nominal**
  - conventionalized clausal constructions:

Apurucayali Asheninca (Arawakan; Peru; Payne *et al.* 1982:230)

- (1) ***o-i-t-a-ri-ka*** *h-ant-i-ri?*  
3F-name-EP-NON<FUT>.REFL-REL-Q 3M-do-FUT-REL  
'What will he make?'



Tapanta Abaza (Northwest Caucasian; Russia; Genko 1955:105-106)

- (2) ***d-z-a-č<sup>w</sup>ə-j-a?***  
3SG.HUM.S-PTCP.OBL-3SG.NON<HUM>.OBL-  
belonging.to[AOR]-3SG.NON<HUM>.S-IPW  
'who?'



# Interrogative

- **interrogative construction**: a linguistic construction dedicated to eliciting information
- **constituent question** (content question, information question, etc.): a question that asks for an instantiation of variable  $x$  for the presupposition *It is known that (possibly) HAPPEN/EXIST (... $x$ ...)*
- **interrogative proform** must have the function of a request for an instantiation of the nominal variable  $x$  as one of its **conventionalized** functions

## Selective vs. non-selective

- **selective**: the speaker **perceives** the choice as being restricted to a **closed set of alternatives**

(1) *Which (one) should I take? This, that, or maybe that?*

- **selective interrogative pronominals** = interrogative **pro-deictic nominals** (pro-nominal demonstratives)

## Selective vs. non-selective

- **non-selective**: the speaker **perceives** the choice as being **free**

(2) *What have you liked most about this book?*

(3) *Who do you see there?*



## Selective vs. non-selective

- the speaker **perceives**...: the border between selective and non-selective is not always clear-cut
  - when the choice is asked to be made between entities of different kinds

French (Matthew 23:17)

a. *Insensés et aveugles! **lequel** est le plus grand, l'or, ou le temple qui **which.one** is the most great*

*sanctifie l'or?* (Louis Second 1910)

b. *Insensés et aveugles que vous êtes! **Qu'est-ce qui** est plus important: **what** is more important*

*l'or ou le Temple qui rend cet or sacré?* (La Bible du Semeur)

# Selective vs. non-selective

- multifunctionality:

- common ‘who?’ for ‘which one (person)?’
- common ‘which one?’ for ‘who?’
- rare ‘what?’ for ‘which one (thing)?’
- rare ‘which one?’ for ‘what?’

a. *All these women here... and who/which is Mary?*

b. *All these cars here... and which/<sup>?</sup>what is yours?*

**How can we define an NIP  
for purposes of cross-linguistic comparison?**

**2. Semantics of NIPs: additional parameters**

# Entity type

- PERSON vs. NON-PERSON (THING)

“...we have the possibility of sometimes treating inanimate entities as persons and, perhaps less often, human beings as non-persons, in one sense or another”

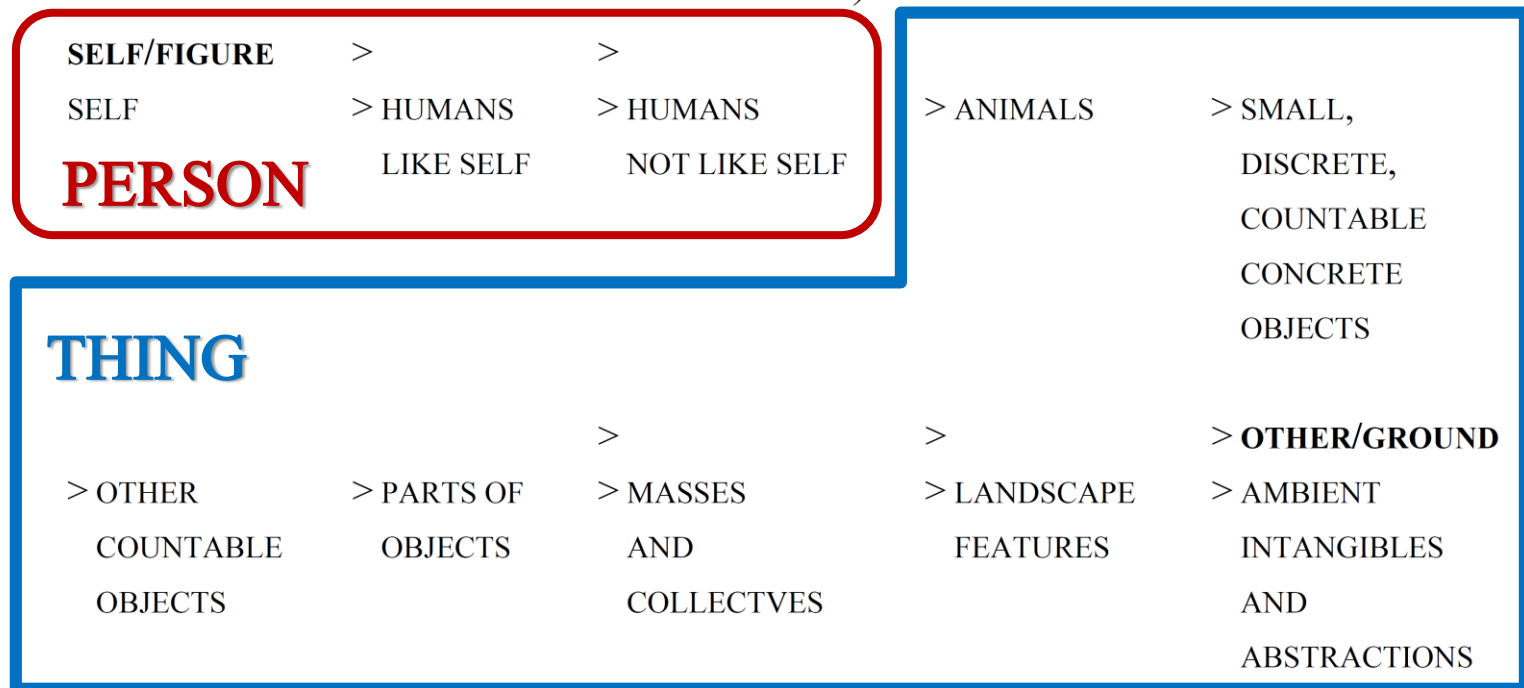
(Dahl & Fraurud 1996:62)

# Entity type

“animacy is just one of the many distinctions that can be made along the scale of SELF vs. OTHER”

(Janda 1996:325)

*Figure 1. “The barest default contours of the SELF-OTHER continuum” (Janda 1996:326)<sup>16</sup>*



# Type of reference

- **identitification**: direct reference
- **classification**: reference via a concept

## Expected answer

- **proper name**: a lexeme “assigned to an *ad hoc* referent in an *ad hoc* name-giving act” (Van Langendonck 2007:6)
- **common noun**: a description

- (1) [Persons A and B see person X. Person B appears to be familiar with X. Person A asks:] *Who is this?*
- a. [B:] *It's John.*
  - b. [B:] *It's my brother/ my doctor.*
  - c. [B:] *'It's the doctor.*
  - d. [B:] *??It's a doctor.*
- (2) [Persons A and B see thing X. Person B appears to be familiar with X. Person A asks:] *What is this?*
- a. [B:] *It's my boomerang/ my neighbour's cherry-tree.*
  - b. [B:] *It's a boomerang/ a cherry-tree.*
  - c. [B:] *??It's the boomerang/ the cherry-tree.*



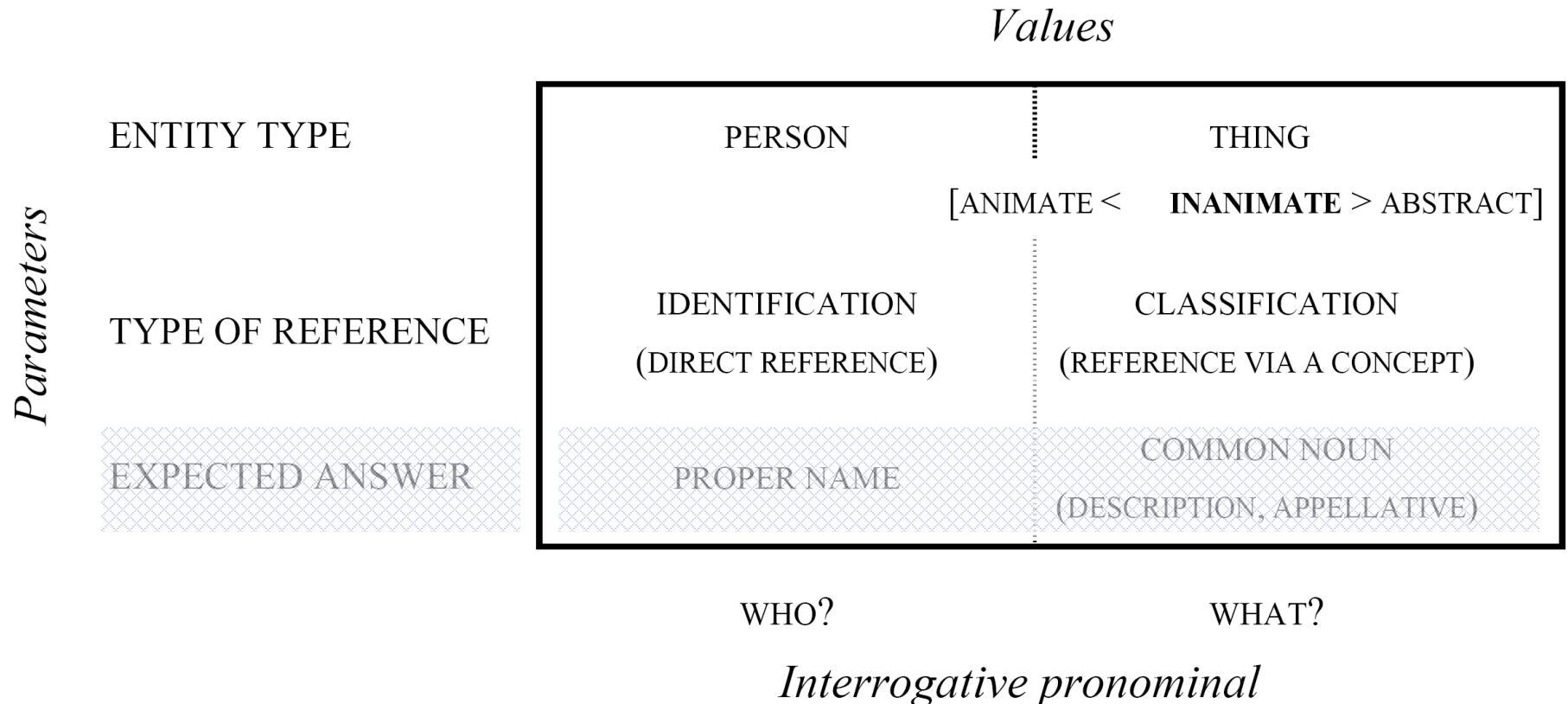
# NIPs: from a typological perspective

For purposes of cross-linguistic comparison, NIPs, ‘who?’ and ‘what?’, are best defined through their functions in terms of **prototypical** (or **canonical**) **combinations of values** of three parameters (cf. Idiatov 2007):

- entity type
- type of reference
- expected answer

# NIPs: from a typological perspective

Figure 1. Conceptual space for delimiting the prototypical functions of non-selective interrogative pronominals



- [person + classification + common noun] (**KIND-questions**)

Russian

- (1) *A on **kto** voobsche? Vrach?*  
and he **who** actually doctor  
‘**What** is he actually? A doctor?’

English vs Russian: **preference to different parameters**

English: TYPE OF REFERENCE → **what?-dominance**

Russian: ENTITY TYPE → **who?-dominance**

- [thing + identification + proper name] (**NAME-questions**)

Kgalagadi (Niger-Congo, Bantu S30; Botswana; Kems Monaka, p.c.)

(1) [A:] *libizho la lehelo lo ke **anye?***  
name of place this is **who**

[B:] *ke Hughunsi*  
is Hukuntsi

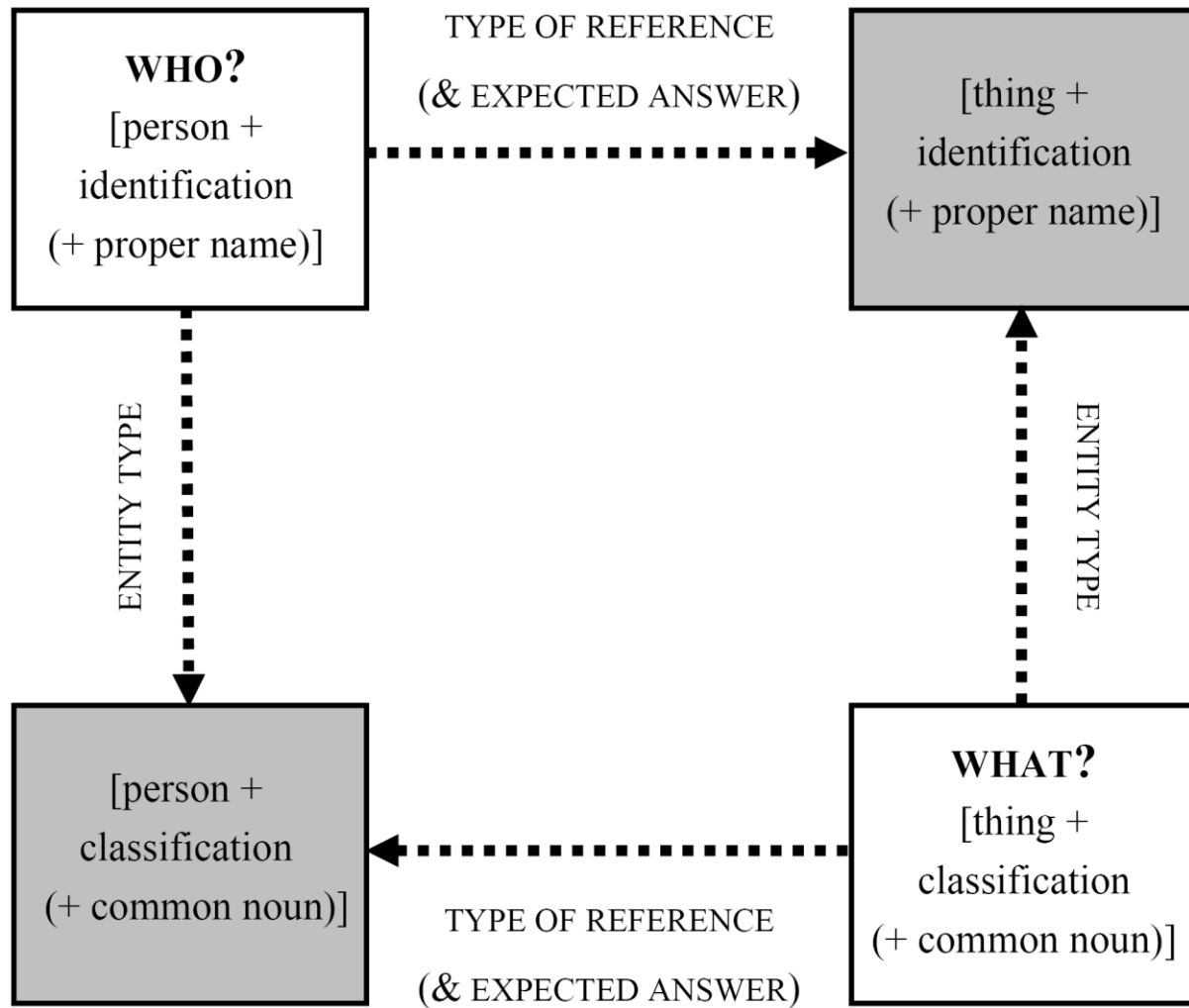
‘[A:] **What** (lit.: ‘**who?**’) is the name of this place?’

[B:] It’s Hukuntsi (a village name)’

English: ENTITY TYPE → **what?-dominance**

Kgalagadi: TYPE OF REFERENCE & EXPECTED  
ANSWER → **who?-dominance**

Figure 2. Conceptual space for non-selective interrogative pronominals



## Some complications:

- a language may choose a different strategy in different contexts even when the combinations of values in these contexts are the same

Vietnamese (Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Viet-Muong; Vietnam; Thu Thi Anh Nguyen, p.c.)

[A:] *Mary là gì/\*ai của bạn?*  
Mary is what/\*who of you

[B:] *Chị ấy là chị dâu của tôi*  
she is sister-in-law of me

‘[A:] What is Mary to you? [B:] She is my sister-in-law.’

## Some complications:

- many languages treat non-human living beings similarly to humans in various respects and some also use ‘who?’ in questions about them (**ANIMATE-questions**)

Russian

(1) **Kto** eto tebja ukusil? Osa?

**who** this you bit wasp

‘[Looking at a swelling on someone’s hand clearly caused by an insect bite:] **What** stung you? A wasp?’

# **‘Who?’/‘what?’-dominance in cases of non-canonical combinations of values: a typology**

	KIND-questions [person + classification (+ common noun)]	NAME-questions [thing + identification (+ proper name)]	Prominence
1	‘who?’	‘who?’	‘who?’
2	‘who?’	‘what?’	ENTITY TYPE
3	‘what?’	‘who?’	TYPE OF REFERENCE
4	‘what?’	‘what?’	‘what?’



# **‘Who?’/‘what?’-dominance in cases of non-canonical combinations of values: a (full) typology**

		KIND-questions	NAME-questions	ANIMATE-questions	Prominence
1	a	‘who?’	‘who?’	‘who?’	‘who?’
	b			(‘what?’)	
2	a	‘who?’	‘what?’	‘who?’	ENTITY TYPE
	b			(‘what?’)	
3		‘what?’	‘who?’	(‘what?’)	TYPE OF REFERENCE
4		‘what?’	‘what?’	(‘what?’)	‘what?’
5		‘what?’	‘what?’	‘who?’	mixed (4/2a)
6		‘what?’	‘who?’	‘who?’	mixed (3/2a)

# NAME-questions

# Questions for proper names

- such a question may or may not involve an interrogative pro-word (IPW)

Bamana (Mande; Mali)

(1) *Í tógô?*

2SG name.ART

‘What’s your name?’

- constructions involving an IPW with a **non-canonical combination of values**:  
[thing + identification + proper name] (**NAME-questions**)
- constructions involving an IPW
  - [IPW is X’s name?] an equation between an IPW and X’s name
  - [IPW is X (by name)?] an equation between an IPW and X (by name)
  - [IPW is X(’s name) named/called?] a non-equational construction with a verb of naming/calling

■ [IPW is X's name?]

Kgalagadi (Niger-Congo, Bantu S30; Botswana; Kems Monaka, p.c.)

(1) [A:] *libizho la lehelo lo ke **anye?***  
name of place this is **who**

[B:] *ke Hughunsi*  
is Hukuntsi

‘[A:] **What** (lit.: ‘**who?**’) is the name of this place?’

[B:] It’s Hukuntsi (a village name)’

■ [IPW is X (by name)?]

Tuvaluan (Austronesian, Remote Oceanic, Nuclear Polynesian; Tuvalu)

- (1) a. *ko-oi tou fenua?*  
FOC-who 2SG.POSS island  
‘What’s your home island?’ or ‘What’s your native country?’ (lit.: ‘Who (is) your island?’) (Besnier 2000:422)
- b. *ko-oi t-tino naa?*  
FOC-who DEF.SG-person that  
‘[Addressed to someone in the dark:] Who is there? (lit.: ‘Who (is) that person?’)’ (Besnier 2000:424)

■ [IPW is X named/called?]

German

(1) ***wie** heißt er?*

***how** is.named he*

‘What’s his name? (lit. ‘How is he named?’)’

(2) Semelai (Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Aslian; Malaysia)

a. *kadeh glɔr?*

who be.named

‘What are (you) called?’, ‘What is your name?’ (Nicole Kruspe, p.c.)

b. *kadeh na-təʔen?*

who DEM-to.down

‘Who is the one (coming) down?’ (Kruspe 1999:293)

# “Avoidance” strategies

- in the case of a non-canonical combination of values, the use of both ‘what?’ and ‘who?’ can be **avoided** altogether
  - **‘how?’**

German

- (1) **wie** *heißt er?*  
**how** is.named he  
‘What’s his name? (lit. ‘How is he named?’)’

Arabela (Zaparoan; Peru; Rolland Rich, p.c.)

- (2) [A:] **taa-te** *quia sesa-ni?* [B:] *John*  
**how** -Q 2SG name-Q PROP  
[A:] What is your name? (lit.: ‘How is your name?’) [B:] John’

# “Avoidance” strategies

- in the case of a non-canonical combination of values, the use of both ‘what?’ and ‘who?’ can be **avoided** altogether
  - ‘where?’

Standard (Eastern) Hausa (Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic; Nigeria)

(1) **inaa** *suuna-n-ka?*

**where** name-of-2SG

‘What is your name? (lit.: ‘Where is your name?’)’ (Paul Newman, p.c.)



# “Avoidance” strategies

- in the case of a non-canonical combination of values, the use of both ‘what?’ and ‘who?’ can be **avoided** altogether

- ‘**which one?**’

Amharic (Afro-Asiatic, West Semitic; Ethiopia; Seyoum Mulugeta, p.c.)

- (1) *səm-əh*     ***yätəṇṇaw***     *näw?*  
name-2SG   **which.one.M.SG**   COP.M.SG  
‘What is your name? (lit.: ‘Which one is your name?’)’

- predicative ‘**which?, what kind of?**’

French

- (2) ***quel***     *est son nom?*  
**which[M.SG]** is his name  
‘What is his name? (lit.: ‘Which is his name?’)’

## NAME-questions: ‘who?’ vs. ‘what?’

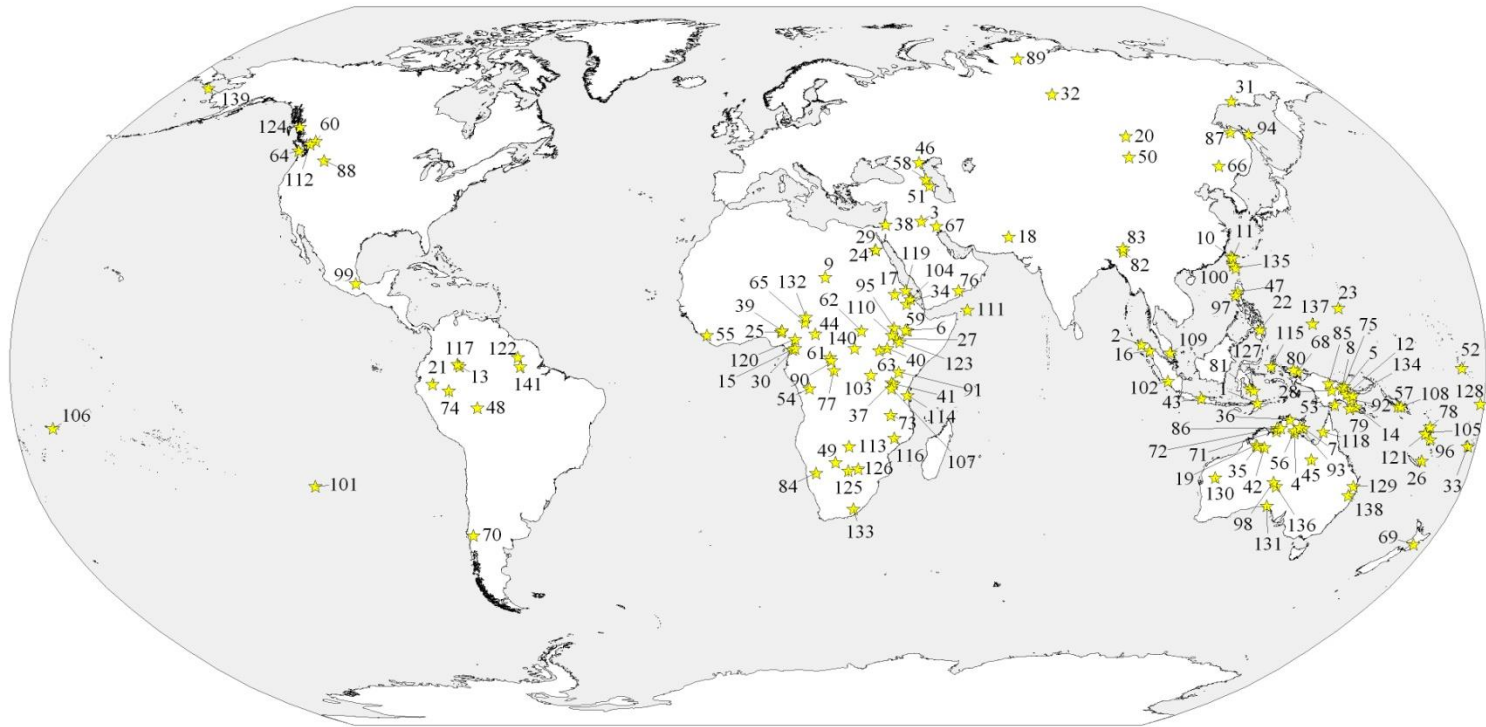
- when no avoidance strategy is resorted to in the case of a non-canonical combination of values, we have either ‘**what?**’-dominance or ‘**who?**’-dominance

Namia (Sepik-Ramu, Sepik, Yellow River; Papua New Guinea; Becky Feldpausch, p.c.)

- (1) [A:] *ne-k(a)*      *ilei*    ***tal(a)***?      [B:] *John*  
         2SG-POSS    name   **who**                                  PROP  
[A:] **What** is your name? [B:] John’

## NAME-questions: personal proper names

- clearly, the **most common context** with ‘who?’-dominance in NAME-questions in the languages of the world



Map 1. The distribution of languages allowing ‘who?’ in NAME-questions about personal proper names

# NAME-questions: proper names of domestic animals

Angami Naga (Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Kuki-Chin-Naga; India; Giridhar 1980:36)

(1) a. *ŋ zâ šūpuò gā?*

your name who Q

‘What is your name?’ (lit.: ‘Who is your name?’)

b. *ŋ f̃ zâ šūpuò gā?*

your dog name who Q

‘What is the name of your dog?’ (lit.: ‘Who is the name of your dog?’)

- a given linguistic community must have domestic animals and these must be considered to be important enough to be given proper names
- possible only in languages where ‘who?’ can be used in NAME-questions about **personal proper names**
- through the assimilation of domestic animals to humans in some respect, i.e. their **personification**

# NAME-questions: proper names of places

- **much less common** and very much restricted both geographically and genetically
- [Who is X (by name)?]: Oceanic branch of Austronesian & the Bantu language Ngombe

(1) Tuvaluan (Austronesian, Remote Oceanic, Nuclear Polynesian; Tuvalu)

a. *ko-oi*      *tou*      *fenua?*

FOC-who 2SG.POSS island

‘What’s your home island?’ or ‘What’s your native country?’ (lit.: ‘Who (is) your island?’) (Besnier 2000:422)

b. *ko-oi*      *t-tino*      *naa?*

FOC-who DEF.SG-person that

‘[Addressed to someone in the dark:] Who is there? (lit.: ‘Who (is) that person?’)’ (Besnier 2000:424)

# NAME-questions: proper names of places

Kgalagadi (Niger-Congo, Bantu S30; Botswana; Kems Monaka, p.c.)

(1) [A:] *libizho la lehelo lo ke **anye?***  
name of place this is **who**

[B:] *ke Hughunsi*  
is Hukuntsi

‘[A:] **What** (lit.: ‘**who?**’) is the name of this place?’

[B:] It’s Hukuntsi (a village name)’

- [Who is X’s name?] and [Who is X named?]: for **all** named places, irrespective of their relation to humans

Poligus Evenki (Altaic, Northern Tungusic; Konstantinova 1968:73)

(2) *ər bi:ra ɲi: gərbi:-n?*  
this river[NOM] who name-3SG.POSS

‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is the name of this river?’

# NAME-questions: temporal proper names

- According to Van Langendonck (2007:225-231), **temporal names** indicating points or periods in time, such as *Monday* or *May*, can function as **proper names**
- [Who is X (by name)?]: Nuclear Polynesian subgroup of Austronesian (only for the names of **months**)

Tuvaluan (Austronesian, Nuclear Polynesian, Samoic-Outlier; Tuvalu; Besnier 2000:423)

- (1) a. *ko-oi te maasina e fano ei koe?*  
FOC-who DEF.SG month NON<PST> go ANAPHORIC 2SG  
'What month are you leaving in?' (lit.: 'Who is the month you are leaving?')
- b. *ko te maasina o oi e fano ei koe?*  
FOC DEF.SG month of who NON<PST> go ANAPHORIC 2SG  
'What month are you leaving in?' (lit.: 'It is the month of who that you are leaving?')

Rapa Nui (Austronesian, Nuclear Polynesian, East; Chile; Du Feu 1996:22)

- (2) *ko-ai te ava'e ko tara hao hai vanaga tire?*  
FOC-who ART month FOC January INS language Chile  
'What (lit.: 'who?') is January in Spanish?'<sup>33</sup>

## NAME-questions: temporal proper names

- [Who is X (by name)?]: Nuclear Polynesian subgroup of Austronesian (only for the names of **months**)
- the names of months are the only kind of temporal names that belongs to the special **morphosyntactic class of proper names** marked by a “personal article”

*i a*                      *hora iti*                      ‘in August’  
in **PERSONAL**                      August

*i te*                      *mahana piti* ‘on Tuesday’  
in **SPECIFIC**                      Tuesday



## NAME-questions: names of “folk genera” (species)

Subiya/Kuhane (Niger-Congo, Bantu K50; Namibia & Botswana; Ndana Ndana, p.c.)

- (1)
- a. *i-zina lye lyi samu njeni?*  
AUG-name of this tree COP.who  
‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is the name of this tree?’
- b. *i-lyi samu lyi sumpwa ni?*  
AUG-this tree it.is.called who  
‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is this tree called?’

(2) Libido (Afro-Asiatic, Highland East Cushitic; Ethiopia; Joachim Crass, p.c.)

- a. *ka hakk’an summi ’aye?*  
this tree.GEN name.NOM who  
‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is the name of this tree?’
- b. *ka hakk’a ’aye yaka’o?*  
this tree.ACC who they.say  
‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) do they call this tree?’

## NAME-questions: pure autonyms

- Pure autonyms are **metalinguistic names**, i.e. linguistic expressions that refer to themselves, such as *stand for* and *about* in the phrase *the words ‘stand for’ and ‘about’* (cf. Van Langendonck 2007:246-249).
- In many respects autonyms behave like proper names and should be considered as “a **subclass of proper names** in their own right” (Van Langendonck 2007:95, 246-249).

## Hadendowa Bedawi/Beja (Afro-Asiatic, North Cushitic; Sudan)

- (1)    *oo-tam*                      <sup>2</sup>*aab*                *eedna*                *t-'arabyeet-iib?*  
ART.M.SG.ACC-sorghum.ball   who.ACC say.IPFV.3PL ART.F.SG-Arab-in  
'What is *sorghum ball* in Arabic? (lit.: 'Who do they call *sorghum ball* in Arabic?')' (Martine Vanhove & Mohamed-Tahir Hamid Ahmed, p.c.)

Libido (Afro-Asiatic, Highland East Cushitic; Ethiopia; Joachim Crass, p.c.)

- (2) a. *libitt'isan* “sheep”-a 'aye *yaka'o?*  
 Libido.language.in “sheep”-ACC who they.say  
 ‘What is *sheep* in Libido? (lit.: ‘Who do they call *sheep* in Libido?’)’

# NAME-questions: some generalizations

- **‘who?’-dominance hierarchy** in NAME-questions: personal proper names (& proper names of domestic animals) < place names < (temporal proper names) < names of folk genera < pure autonyms
- with every step to the right, the number of languages involved **reduces drastically**, i.e. with a magnitude of several times
- on the world-wide scale, there are **3 major foci of ‘who?’-dominance** in NAME-questions:
  - Bantu and Cushitic languages in Africa
  - Austronesian languages in Asia and the Pacific
  - Pama-Nyungan languages in Australia

# Explaining the use of ‘who?’: personal proper names

Namia (Sepik-Ramu, Sepik, Yellow River; Papua New Guinea; Becky Feldpausch, p.c.)

- (1) [A:] *ne-k(a) ilei tal(a)?* [B:] *John*  
2SG-POSS name **who** PROP  
[A:] **What** is your name? [B:] John'

- It is the **categorical presuppositional meaning** of the proper name expected as an answer, viz. the fact that it is a proper name of a person (or a personified entity), that is metonymically taken into account

## **Explaining the use of ‘who?’: toponyms, etc.**

- An explanation appealing to the categorical presuppositional meaning of proper names cannot be extended to account for the use of ‘who?’ in questions for names whose categorical presuppositional meaning is not a person (or at least a personified being, as in the case of domestic animals, deities and the like), such as toponyms, temporal names, folk genera and autonyms

# Explaining the use of ‘who?’: toponyms, etc.

- A **synchronic explanation**: the use of ‘who?’ is due to the proper name status, **propriality**, of these nouns.
  - questions for personal proper names involve the use of ‘who?’ due to the categorical presuppositional meaning of the personal proper names
  - the language has a clear morphosyntactic class of proper names containing both personal and non-personal nouns
  - by analogy, questions for non-personal proper names also involve the use of ‘who?’
- This explanation may work for the Austronesian languages with a special **morphosyntactic class of proper names** marked by a “personal article”
- Elsewhere, such explanation is much more problematic due to the very abstract nature of its semantic basis, viz. propriality, which is supposed to override the **semantic clash** between the very concrete categorical presuppositional meanings of the personal and non-personal proper names.

# Explaining the use of ‘who?’: toponyms, etc.

- A **diachronic explanation**: the use of ‘who?’ is due to a concurrence of certain developments in the evolution of the IPWs
  - on an earlier stage, a selective (or locative) interrogative indifferent to the semantic opposition person vs. non-person was used in questions about (personal & non-personal) proper names to avoid the use of ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ (**avoidance strategy**)
  - this selective (or locative) interrogative has developed into ‘who?’, as is not uncommon cross-linguistically
  - as a result, questions for (personal & non-personal) proper names involve the use of ‘who?’

# Cushitic (a branch of Afro-Asiatic)

- **avoidance strategies** are not uncommon in NAME-questions in Afro-Asiatic

Standard (Eastern) Hausa (Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic; Nigeria)

- (1) *inaa* *suuna-n-ka?*  
**where** name-of-2SG

‘What is your name? (lit.: ‘Where is your name?’)’ (Paul Newman, p.c.)

Amharic (Afro-Asiatic, West Semitic; Ethiopia; Seyoum Mulugeta, p.c.)

- (1) *səm-əh* *yätənnaw* *näw?*  
name-2SG **which.one.M.SG** COP.M.SG

‘What is your name? (lit.: ‘Which one is your name?’)’

- Beja ‘who?’ <sup>?</sup>*a:b* (ACC), <sup>?</sup>*aw* (NOM) is a reflex of Proto-Cushitic \*<sup>?</sup>*ayy*- ‘**which one?**’.
- Compare also Saho (East Cushitic) *ay* ~ *a*: ‘who?, what?, which [N]?, what (kind of) [N]?’; Proto-Cushitic \*<sup>?</sup>*ay(y)u-da* ‘where?’, (primarily) South Omotic <sup>?</sup>*ay* ‘who?’, (primarily) North Omotic <sup>?</sup>*ay-(b-)* ‘what?’, and Proto-Semitic \*<sup>?</sup>*ay* ‘where?’.



# Bantu (a branch of Niger-Congo)

- **avoidance strategies** are not uncommon in NAME-questions in Bantu and Niger-Congo

Eton (Niger-Congo, Bantu A71; Cameroon; Van de Velde 2008:179)

- (1) pèpá wô àṅgábé ʔdwé yá?  
|pèpá ú-ò à-ṅá-bé d-òé já|  
father I-your I-RP-COP 5-name how  
‘How was your father called?’

- As discussed in Idiatov (2009), Bantu ‘who?’ interrogatives commonly reconstructed as *\*n(d)a(n)i* have developed out of a **selective interrogative** ‘which one?’ and ultimately a **locative interrogative** construction *\*[AG9(or AG7) COP G16-‘what?’]*.
- In several Bantu languages of zone C, reflexes of this interrogative construction mean both ‘who?’ and ‘what?’

# Conclusions

- The use of ‘who?’ in questions for personal proper names supports the relevance of the notion of **categorical presuppositional meanings** of proper names
- **Propriality** can account only for a small part of cases of the use of ‘who?’ in NAME-questions for non-personal proper names in the languages of the world
- A **diachronic explanation** of the use of ‘who?’ in NAME-questions (especially, about very marginal kinds of proper names, such as names of “folk genera” and pure autonyms) is more adequate and should be preferred all things being equal