Non-selective interrogative pronominals, categorical presuppositional meanings of proper names and propriality

Overview...

- A typology of non-selective interrogative pronominals (Idiatov 2007)
- Questions for proper names in the languages of the world
- Use of "who?" in questions for proper names
- Relevance of the notion of categorical presuppositional meanings of proper names
- Propriality as explanation

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?

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 (cf. Idiatov 2007).

Russian

(1) Ao n kto voobsche? Vrach?
    and he who actually doctor
    ‘What is he actually? A doctor?’

[person + classification + common noun] (KIND-questions)
• [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 is the name of this place?
B: It’s Hukuntsi (a village name)”

Some complications:

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

• 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 tebjaka? what: 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 (full) typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPW</th>
<th>[thing + identification + proper name]</th>
<th>[thing + identification + proper name]</th>
<th>[thing + identification + proper name]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>who</td>
<td>who</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“who”</td>
<td>“who”</td>
<td>“who”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“who”</td>
<td>“who”</td>
<td>TYPE OF REFERENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“who”</td>
<td>“who”</td>
<td>“who”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions for proper names

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

Bamana (Mande; Mali)

(1) i gie?

Zig name

“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
“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) wa 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) is name-2SG
  “What is your name?” (lit.: ‘Which one is your name?’)

• predicative “which?, what kind of?”

French
(2) que name-2SG
  “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.

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

- 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 & a Bantu language

Ngombe

Map 2. The distribution of languages allowing "who?" in NAME-questions about proper names.

NAME-questions: proper names of places

According to Besnier (2000:422), in Tuvaluan, interrogative ai/ei/oi 'who?' is "also used in questions about names of regional or political import: islands, islands and atolls, island groups, countries, and continents fall in this category". Together with personal proper names, these words form a lexico-syntactic class of proprial nominals in Tuvaluan.

- not "regional or political import" but rather the conceptualization of the respective places as inhabited (or at least, as typically inhabited), that is as related to humans.

Fenua is not only 'island', but also 'country' and 'island community'.
NAME-questions: proper names of places

Kgalagadi (Niger-Congo, Bantu K10; Botswana; Kems Monaka, p.c.)
(1) [A:] libizho lo lehelo lo le ke anye?
name of place this is who
[B:] ke Hughano
is Hughano
[A:] What (B1: who?) is the name of this place?
[B:] It’s Hughano (a village name)

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

Poligas Evengi (Ahuic, Northern Tungusic; Konstantinova 1968:73)
(2) ar heri jij gic gari-t?
this read[who] who name-SG
“What (B1: who?) is the name of this read?”

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)

Tuvahau (Austronesian, Nuclear Polynesian, Samoic-Outlier; Tuvahau Berries 2000:42)
(1) - ke te manuntos a e dia e le so?
FOC-who is month of who NON-MPT go ANaphoric 2SG
“What month are you leaving in?” (lit.: “Who is the month you are leaving?”)
ke te manuntos a e dia e le so?
FOC-DEF-who month of who NON-MPT go ANaphoric 2SG
“What month are you leaving in?” (lit.: “It is the month of who that you are leaving?”)
Repa Nat (Austronesian, Nuclear Polynesian, East; Chile; Du First 1986:22)
(2) i te mahana piti ‘on Tuesday’
in SPECIFIC Tuesday
FOC-who day month FOC January 5th language Chile
“What (lit.: “who?”) is January in Spanish?”

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

“folk genera” largely correspond to basic level terms in hierarchies such as animal [“life form”] > dog [“folk genus”] > beagle [“specific taxon”]

[Who is X (by name?)]: examples are somewhat problematic

[Who is X’s name?] and [Who is X named?]: 4 Bantu languages (Tswana, Tswapong, Kgalagadi and Subiya/Kuhane), and two Cushitic languages (Hadeniowa Bedawi and Libido)

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).

Hudendawa Bedawi (Afro-Asiatic, North Cushitic; Sudan)
(1) a ar i sabar sabar il- jib
Art.3SG.ACC-sabar-sabar-him.bul who.ACC say-DV see ART.3SG.Ami-bul
“What is everyone that in Amhara?” (lit.: “Who do they call everyone that in Amhara?”) (Martine Vanhove & Mohamed Talal Haral Ahmed, p.c.)
Libido (Afro-Asiatic, Highland East Cushitic; Ethiope, Joachim Cross, p.c.)
(2) a abitar a i sabar a sabar il- jib
Libido-language in “shap-bu ACC who they.say
“What is everyone in Libido?” (lit.: “Who do they call everyone in Libido?”)
NAME-questions: some generalizations

- 'who?'-dominance hierarchy: 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

- Nama (Sepik-Ramu, Sepik, Yellow River; Papua New Guinea; Becky Feldpausch, p.c.)
  (1) [A:] no-kaa/ a: na yee/ [B:] Aboe
  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 '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) ìnaa 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) səəm-h yätəɲɲ aw näw?
    name-2SG which.one.M.SG COP.M.SG
    'What is your name? (lit.: 'Which one is your name?')'
  - Beja 'who?' ʔa:b (ACC), ʔaw (NOM) is a reflex of Proto-Cushitic *ʔyy- 'which one?'
  - Compare also Saho (East Cushitic) ay ~ a: 'who?, what?, what (kind of) [N]', Proto-Cushitic *ʔyy to da 'where?', (primarily) South Omotic ḥap 'who?', (primarily) North Omotic ḥap (b-) 'what?', and Proto-Semitic *ʔyy 'where?'.

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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)
  
  `xp a b`-c(R,\(\text{who}\)) \`b\(\text{do}\)` \`[\(\text{who}\) \`p\(\text{he}\)` \`b\(\text{do}\)` \`\text{whom}\` \`[\(\text{who}\)` \`p\(\text{he}\)` \`b\(\text{do}\)` \`\text{whom}\` \`\text{who}\`, \`\text{whom}\`, \`\text{who}\`, \`\text{whom}\`

  *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 *`[\(\text{who}\)` \`\text{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