

The Construction Meaning of Interrogatives: Evidence From Embodied Grammar

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Abstract: In formal semantics polar interrogatives are often conceived as pairs of a proposition and its negation (Hamblin 1958). While allowing for interesting research, this view lacks plausible cognitive grounding. We therefore propose that propositional contents are represented by pairs of situation tokens and situation types: In positive declaratives the token fits (or fails to fit) the type, in interrogatives the question of fit does not arise because the token is insufficiently specified. In order to test this assumption we adapted an embodied grammar experimental design that demonstrated the action–sentence compatibility effect (ACE, Glenberg & Kaschak), the influence of the motion described in the sentence subjects are primed with on the motor response they perform: If described and performed motion match in direction, facilitation is observed, else inhibition. Our results are incompatible with the Hamblin view: Interrogatives trigger an ACE between those of positive and negative declaratives.