English rising declaratives of the Quality-suspending kind

Matthijs Westera

Universitat Pompeu Fabra
(University of Amsterdam)

GLiF, 16-11-2017
Prelude (1/2): a simple question

How does communication work?

For example:

(1) A: We ran out of vegetables.

Hearing (1), we come to believe that they ran out of vegetables. What justifies this new belief?
Prelude (1/2): a simple question

*How does communication work?*
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How does communication work?

**HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR SPOUSE WITHOUT FIGHTING IN 7 SIMPLE STEPS**

**STEP 1**
Pay attention to your spouse whenever you have a conversation.

**STEP 2**
Don’t yell at your spouse when you are trying to convey a message or talking to each other.

**STEP 3**
Put yourself in your spouse’s shoes so you can see the issue from your their point of view.

**STEP 4**
Confirm understanding by asking your spouse if they understand what you are communicating to them.

**STEP 5**
Try using different communication methods when your spouse does not understand something you said.

**STEP 6**
Take a break if you are not making progress communicating your thoughts or start to feel frustrated.

**STEP 7**
Apply the above steps every time you communicate with your spouse.

www.successfulmarriage.com/communicatebetter
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*What justifies this new belief?*
Prelude (2/2): Cooperativity

Sem./prag. theories often rely on full compliance with the maxims:

- say only what is true, relevant, sufficiently informative, clear;
- but this is not a reasonable assumption.
  At best we may assume cooperativity:
  - i.e., merely to try one’s best to comply;
  - and this is too weak for most inferences/explanations.

Solution:
- Cooperative speakers inform each other about whether they think they have complied with the maxims.
  "Compliance marking." But how?
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English rising declaratives of the Quality-suspending kind

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Outline

1. Introduction & core assumption
2. The empirical phenomenon
3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics
4. Explaining the three main characteristics
5. Conclusion
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3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics

4. Explaining the three main characteristics

5. Conclusion
1.1. Rising declaratives

(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*  
B: It’s raining?
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    M: Hello, my name is Mark Liberman...?
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   ▶ final rise indicates incompleteness, contingency, open-endedness, ...
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From Gussenhoven 2004, simplified:

\[
\text{Intonation Phrase} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l}
\%H \\
\%L \\
\end{array} \right. 
\]

B: On an unrelated note, Fred likes vegetables. Similar theories exist for many languages. On top of this there is paralinguistic intonation: e.g., overall volume, pitch, speed, extent of pitch excursions; these correlate in a continuous way with 'meaning'.
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L \\}
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L\% \%
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Assumption 1 (Westera 2013, 2017):

L%: “I believe that my utterance, up to this boundary, complies with the maxims.”
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QUIZ!

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What the ICM theory predicts depends on:

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Main characteristics of the Quality-suspending kind (Gunlogson 2008):

- **question-likeness**, e.g., uncertain truth, inviting “yes” / “no” answer;
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- **speaker bias**, i.e., proposition expressed is deemed likely;
2.1. The Quality-suspending kind

(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
B: It’s raining? Quality

(3) B: What do you think of your new neighbor?
A: He’s attractive? Relation

(4) A: *(Receptionist)* Can I help you?
M: Hello, my name is Mark Liberman...? Quantity

(5) A: Bonjour!
B: Bonjour, I’d like... err... je veux... a black coffee? Manner

Main characteristics of the Quality-suspending kind (Gunlogson 2008):

- **question-likeness**, e.g., uncertain truth, inviting “yes”/“no” answer;
- **speaker bias**, i.e., proposition expressed is deemed likely;
- **badness out-of-the-blue**, i.e., requires some contextual setup.
2.2. Main characteristics (1/3): question-likeness

(2)  A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
    B: It's raining?
2.2. Main characteristics (1/3): question-likeness

(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*  
B: It's raining?

From Farkas & Roelofsen 2017:

(8) a. ‘Is it raining’, she wondered/asked.  
b. ‘It’s raining’, she wondered/asked.
2.2. Main characteristics (1/3): question-likeness

(2)  A:  (Enters with an umbrella.)
     B:  It’s raining?

From Farkas & Roelofsen 2017:

(8)  a.  ‘Is it raining’, she wondered/asked.
     b.  ‘It’s raining’, she wondered/asked.
     c.  ‘It’s raining’, she wondered/asked.
2.2. Main characteristics (1/3): question-likeness

(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
B: It’s raining?

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(8) a. ‘Is it raining’, she wondered/asked.
b. ‘It’s raining’, she wondered/asked.
c. ‘It’s raining’, she wondered/asked.

From Farkas & Roelofsen 2017 (based on Malamud & Stephenson 2015):

(9) a. This is a beautiful sunset.
b. (?) Is this a beautiful sunset?
2.2. Main characteristics (1/3): question-likeness

(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
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From Farkas & Roelofsen 2017 (based on Malamud & Stephenson 2015):

(9)  a. This is a beautiful sunset.
    b. (?) Is this a beautiful sunset?
    c. (?) This is a beautiful sunset?
    d. This is a beautiful sunset, isn’t it?
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(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*  
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(9) a. This is a beautiful sunset.  
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2.3. Main characteristics (2/3): speaker bias

(2)  A:  *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
    B:  It's raining?

From Gunlogson 2003:

(10) *(At a committee hearing:)*
    a.  Are you a member of the Communist party?
2.3. Main characteristics (2/3): speaker bias

\[(2)\quad \text{A: (Enters with an umbrella.)}\]
\[\text{B: It's raining?}\]

From Gunlogson 2003:
\[(10)\quad \text{(At a committee hearing:)}\]
\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{Are you a member of the Communist party?} \\
\text{b. } & \text{You’re a member of the Communist party?}
\end{align*}\]
2.3. Main characteristics (2/3): speaker bias

(2)  A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
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From Gunlogson 2003:

(10) *(At a committee hearing:)*

a.  Are you a member of the Communist party?

b.  (?) You’re a member of the Communist party?

- In (2) the source of the bias is *contextual evidence*;
2.3. Main characteristics (2/3): speaker bias

(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
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From Gunlogson 2003:

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   a. Are you a member of the Communist party?
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- In (2) the source of the bias is *contextual evidence*;
- but this need not be the case (Poschmann 2008, Gunlogson 2008):
2.3. Main characteristics (2/3): speaker bias

\[ \text{(2)} \quad \begin{array}{ll} A: & \text{(Enters with an umbrella.)} \\ B: & \text{It's raining?} \end{array} \]

From Gunlogson 2003:

\[ \text{(10) \quad \text{(At a committee hearing:)}} \]
\[ a. \quad \text{Are you a member of the Communist party?} \]
\[ b. \quad \text{(?)} \quad \text{You’re a member of the Communist party?} \]

- In (2) the source of the bias is \textit{contextual evidence};
- but this need not be the case (Poschmann 2008, Gunlogson 2008):

\[ \text{(11) \quad \text{(On the phone with Schiphol information.) \quad [from Beun 2000]}} \]
\[ \text{Caller: Hello. I have to go to Barcelona, from Amsterdam.} \]
\[ \quad \text{Can you tell me which flights leave next Sunday?} \]
\[ \text{Agent: Just a moment. \ldots Yes, there are several flights. One} \]
\[ \quad \text{leaves at 9.10, one at 11.10, and one at 17.30.} \]
\[ \text{Caller: The flight takes about three hours?} \]
2.4. Main characteristics (3/3): badness out-of-the-blue

(2) A: (Enters with an umbrella.)
B: It's raining?
2.4. Main characteristics (3/3): badness out-of-the-blue

(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*

B: It's raining?

(12) *(With no contextual setup:)*

a. Is the weather supposed to be nice this weekend?
2.4. Main characteristics (3/3): badness out-of-the-blue

(2) A: (Enters with an umbrella.)
B: It's raining?

(12) (With no contextual setup:)
   a. Is the weather supposed to be nice this weekend?
   b. The weather’s supposed to be nice this weekend?
2.4. Main characteristics (3/3): badness out-of-the-blue

(2)  A: (Enters with an umbrella.)
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- Many conflate bias & badness out-of-the-blue (e.g., Gunlogson ’03);
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▶ Many conflate bias & badness out-of-the-blue (e.g., Gunlogson ’03);  
▶ But (11), repeated, shows that they are distinct features:
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Hence:

▶ **Speaker bias:** the speaker considers the proposition expressed likely  
    (for whatever reason, contextual or otherwise);
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   Caller: The flight takes about three hours?

Hence:

▶ **Speaker bias:** the speaker considers the proposition expressed likely
  (for whatever reason, contextual or otherwise);
▶ **Badness out of the blue:** What needs to be contextually present is
  not evidence, but something like the topic of discourse.
2.5. Previous work

Final rise on declarative would:

- express incompleteness, contingency, open-endedness etc.; (many)

Offensively brief review:

- most don’t generalize to other rising declaratives (or beyond);
- most don’t try to explain all three characteristics;
- those that do, end up assuming rather than explaining them.
2.5. Previous work

Final rise on declarative would:

- express incompleteness, contingency, open-endedness etc.; (many)
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▶ express incompleteness, contingency, open-endedness etc.;  (many)
▶ commit the addressee;  (Gunlogson, 2003)
▶ convey ‘possibly’ (or ‘might’);  (Nilsenova, 2006)
▶ convey ‘possibly not’;  (Truckenbrodt, 2006)
▶ signal a contingent commitment;  (Gunlogson, 2008)
▶ yields a second-person speech-act;  (Trinh & Crnić, 2011)
▶ makes it a polar question (bipartition);  (Farkas & Roelofsen, 2017)
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- most don’t generalize to other rising declaratives (or beyond);
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- those that do, end up assuming rather than explaining them.
Outline

1. Introduction & core assumption

2. The empirical phenomenon

3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics

4. Explaining the three main characteristics

5. Conclusion
Preview of the explanations

[SPOILER ALERT]
Preview of the explanations

[SPOILER ALERT]

Question-likeness:

Speaker bias:

Badness out-of-the-blue:
Preview of the explanations

[SPOILER ALERT]

**Question-likeness:**
- suspending Quality entails uncertain truth;

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Preview of the explanations

[SPOILER ALERT]

Question-likeness:
- suspending Quality entails uncertain truth;
- compliance with Relation suggests that it is worth knowing;

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Preview of the explanations

[SPOILER ALERT]

Question-likeness:
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- one may risk violating Quality only if the risk is sufficiently small;

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[spoiler alert]

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3.1. What are maxims, anyway?
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- cognitive science
- goals
- beliefs
- what is uttered
- syntax, phonology, etc.

Building primarily on:
- ▶ Grice 1975 (1989): sentence meaning vs. speaker meaning;
- ▶ Roberts 1996 (2012): questions under discussion (QUD)
3.1. What are maxims, anyway?

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3.2. Illustration

(QUDs) beliefs

goals

intents

contents

what is uttered

It's common knowledge that J+M never attend rainy parties.

a. A: Were John and Mary at the party?

b. B: It was raining.
(14) *(It’s common knowledge that J+M never attend rainy parties.)*

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QUDs

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"It was raining."

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a. A: Were John and Mary at the party?

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3.3. Definition of the maxims

Assumption 2: The maxims
▶ Quality: Your intent is true.
▶ Relation: Your intent is an answer to the QUD.
▶ Quantity: Your intent entails all answers to the QUD that you believe are true.
▶ Manner: Your intent is clearly conveyed by the content expressed, and as concisely as clarity allows.

The devil is in the details... These details were put into place to fit intonation; but they have wider implications.
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The devil is in the details...

- these details were put into place to fit intonation;
- but they have wider implications.
3.4. Why suspend a maxim at all?

**Assumption 3:** A speaker will try to ensure compliance with all the maxims, suspending (= knowingly violate or risk violating) a maxim only if ensuring compliance was impossible.
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For the maxims (as defined) this occurs only in certain circumstances.
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For *the* maxims (as defined) this occurs only in certain circumstances.

For instance:
- if the speaker knows exactly what the QUD is;
- and the QUD is closed under intersection;
- and there are no communication problems;
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For instance:

- if the speaker knows exactly what the QUD is;
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For instance:
- if the speaker knows exactly what the QUD is;
- and the QUD is closed under intersection;
- and there are no communication problems;
- then a final H% can only be blamed on a Quality/Relation clash.

Also interesting:
- The only reason to suspend Quality is a clash with Relation, i.e., if there is no answer to the QUD which the speaker believes is true.
3.5. Interim summary

A common methodology:

- explain speaker behavior in terms of their goals & beliefs;
3.5. Interim summary

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- explain speaker behavior in terms of their goals & beliefs;
- by constraining the relation between utterance and goals & beliefs;
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A common methodology:
- explain speaker behavior in terms of their goals & beliefs;
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- explain speaker behavior in terms of their goals & beliefs;
- by constraining the relation between utterance and goals & beliefs;
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- the maxims are those constraints that govern intents and contents (i.e., speaker meaning and sentence meaning).
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Once we take (intonational) compliance marking into account:

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▶ H% marks suspending a maxim, not, e.g., QUD-constraints;
▶ it starts to matter (more) how exactly the maxims are defined.

Concretely, with the current definition:

▶ Quality suspensions can be blamed only on a clash with Relation.
Outline

1. Introduction & core assumption
2. The empirical phenomenon
3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics
4. Explaining the three main characteristics
5. Conclusion
4.1. The explanations in a nutshell

- Pragmatics:
  - Question-likeness: suspending Quality entails uncertain truth; compliance with Relation suggests that it is worth knowing;
  - Speaker bias: one may risk violating Quality only if the risk is sufficiently small;
  - Badness out-of-the-blue: don't risk violating Quality if opting out, by asking an interrogative question, would have been a good alternative; interrogatives are bad when the question is already 'on the table'.

Even if it sounds plausible, that doesn't mean it works.
4.1. The explanations in a nutshell

**Question-likeness:**

**Speaker bias:**

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▶ the speaker doesn’t believe the intent is true;
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Hence the speaker is uncertain about the truth.
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Supposing it’s a Quality suspension: (*)
  ▶ the speaker doesn’t believe the intent is true;
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(*: How would an addressee figure this out?)
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Supposing it’s a Quality suspension: (*)
  ▶ the speaker doesn’t believe the intent is true;
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Hence the speaker is uncertain about the truth.

(∗: How would an addressee figure this out?)
(∗∗: Why? (Assuming QUDs aren’t generally closed under negation...))
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Supposing it’s a Quality suspension: (*)
  ▶ the speaker doesn’t believe the intent is true;
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The reason must be to ensure compliance with Relation;

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Hence the invitation of a “yes”/“no” response.

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(*: How would an addressee figure this out?)
(**: Why? (Assuming QUDs aren’t generally closed under negation...))
(***: What about other ways of coping with a Quality/Relation clash?)
4.3. Speaker bias

Suppose Quality is twice as important as Relation...
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Suppose Quality is twice as important as Relation...

- exp. reward = 2 × prob(intent is true) + 1 × prob(intent ∈ QUD)
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- suspend Quality to ensure compliance with Relation:
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- suspend Quality to ensure compliance with Relation:
  exp. reward $= 2 \times \text{prob}(\text{intent is true}) + 1 \times 1$;
- violate Relation to ensure compliance with Quality:
  exp. reward $= 2 \times 1 + 1 \times 0$;
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so: suspend Quality only if \text{prob}(\text{intent is true}) \geq 0.5.
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**Assumption 4:** Quality is more than twice as important as Relation.
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**Assumption 4:** Quality is more than twice as important as Relation.

When this doesn’t hold, we expect to see bias-free rising declaratives...

(15) A: Hey B, guess what the weather is like.
    B: I have absolutely no idea; I haven’t been outside in days.
    A: Guess!!!
    B: Fine. It’s raining?
4.4. Badness out of the blue (1/3)

Let’s remind ourselves:

(13) (On the phone with Schiphol information.)

...  
Agent: One leaves at 9.10, one at 11.10, and one at 17.30.  
Caller: The flight takes about three hours?
Let’s remind ourselves:

(13) (On the phone with Schiphol information.)

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Agent: One leaves at 9.10, one at 11.10, and one at 17.30. 
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(12) (With no contextual setup:)

a. Is the weather supposed to be nice this weekend? 
b. (?) The weather’s supposed to be nice this weekend?
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Summing up:

▶ the required contextual setup is not the speaker bias;
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- rather, it is something like the topic, or QUD;
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Summing up:

▶ the required contextual setup is not the speaker bias;
▶ rather, it is something like the topic, or QUD;
▶ interrogatives, by contrast, are fine without contextual setup...
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Suspending a maxim is only one way of dealing with a clash; an alternative is *opting out:*
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**Assumption 6:**
- Rather than *suspend* Quality, it is better to *opt out* of making an informational contribution, merely introducing a QUD...
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Suspending a maxim is only one way of dealing with a clash; an alternative is *opting out*:

**Assumption 6:**

- Rather than *suspend* Quality, it is better to *opt out* of making an informational contribution, merely introducing a QUD...
- ...unless doing so would result in not making any contribution at all (namely, if the QUD was already on the table);
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- in the latter case, making a tentative informational contribution, even one which suspends Quality, is preferred.
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Supposing that interrogatives serve only to introduce QUDs, we get:
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Supposing that interrogatives serve only to introduce QUDs, we get:
- rising declaratives are fine if the QUD is already on the table;
- but not if it isn’t – then an interrogative is preferred.
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Supposing that interrogatives serve only to introduce QUDs, we get:

- rising declaratives are fine if the QUD is already on the table;
- but not if it isn’t – then an interrogative is preferred.

**Complication:**

- whether QUD is already ‘on the table’ is partly up to the speaker...
4.6. Badness out of the blue (3/3)

No apparent complementary distribution (Gunlogson, 2003):

(16)  A:  *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
    B:  a. It’s raining?
        b. Is it raining?
4.6. Badness out of the blue (3/3)

No apparent complementary distribution (Gunlogson, 2003):

(16)   A: (Enters with an umbrella.)
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► A context may suggest/evoke a certain question...
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No apparent complementary distribution (Gunlogson, 2003):

(16) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
    B: a. It’s raining?
      b. Is it raining?

▶ A context may suggest/evoke a certain question...
▶ but it’s the speaker who decides if they want to treat this as a QUD
  being already ‘on the table’,

Pragmatics:

even if it sounds plausible
that doesn’t mean it works
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(16) A: (Enters with an umbrella.)
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➤ but it’s the speaker who decides if they want to treat this as a QUD being already ‘on the table’, based on, e.g.:
   ➤ expressing or avoiding ownership of the QUD;
4.6. Badness out of the blue (3/3)

No apparent complementary distribution (Gunlogson, 2003):

(16)  A:  *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
    B:  a.  It’s raining?
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**Core prediction:** rising declaratives are fine if, and only if:
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**Core prediction:** rising declaratives are fine if, and only if:
▶ the context presents an *opportunity* for the speaker to present the QUD as being already ‘on the table’;
▶ and the speaker decides, for rhetorical reasons (etc.), to take it up.
Outline

1. Introduction & core assumption
2. The empirical phenomenon
3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics
4. Explaining the three main characteristics
5. Conclusion
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By (re)conceiving of this in terms of ‘suspending a maxim’ (and by being rather precise about what that means):

- the ICM theory predicts the various uses of rising declaratives;
- while also explaining core characteristics of, in this case, the Quality-suspending kind.
5.2. Further applications
5.3. Returning to “Prelude (1/2): a simple question”

How does communication work?

For example:

(17) A: We ran out of vegetables.

Hearing (1), we come to believe that they ran out of vegetables.

What justifies this new belief?