The pragmatics and prosody of declarative ‘questions’ (and interrogative questions)

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Konstanz, 23-11-2017
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

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What justifies this new belief?
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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Outline

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

2. The empirical phenomenon

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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(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*  
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   A: He’s attractive?
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(4) A: *(Receptionist)* Can I help you?
   M: Hello, my name is Mark Liberman...?
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Previous work (e.g., Bolinger 1982; Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990):  
▶ final rise indicates incompleteness, contingency, open-endedness, ...
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   Quality

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   A: He's attractive?
   Relation

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   M: Hello, my name is Mark Liberman...?
   Quantity

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

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1.2. English intonational phonology

From Gussenhoven 2004, simplified:

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

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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\%H \\
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H^* \\
L^* \\
\end{array} \right\}^n
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H*(L) \\
L*(H) \\
L*H(L)
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\[ n \]

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\begin{array}{cccccc}
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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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Why “up to this boundary”? Consider:

(7) John was there, Mary, and Bill.
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\[ L\%: \text{“I believe that my utterance, up to this boundary, complies with the maxims.”} \quad (\Box \text{Maxims}) \]

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\%: Conveys nothing at all (except indirectly).

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(7) John was there, Mary, and Bill.
   L*H H% L*H H% H*L L%

What the ICM theory predicts depends on:
   ▶ how exactly the maxims are defined;

QUIZ!

Quantity? Manner?
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What the ICM theory predicts depends on:

- how exactly the maxims are defined;
- when it is permissible to violate or risk violating a maxim;
1.3. Intonational compliance marking (ICM)

Assumption 1 (Westera 2013, 2017):

\[ \text{L}\% : \text{“I believe that my utterance, up to this boundary, complies with the maxims.”} \] (\(\square\)Maxims)

\[ \text{H}\% : \text{“I don’t (necessarily) believe that my utterance, up to this boundary, complies with the maxims.”} \] (\(\neg\square\)Maxims)

\[ \% : \text{Conveys nothing at all (except indirectly).} \]

Why “up to this boundary”? Consider:

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\[ \text{L*H H\% L*H H\% H*L L\%} \]

What the ICM theory predicts depends on:

- how exactly the maxims are defined;
- when it is permissible to violate or risk violating a maxim; and
- disambiguation by context and paralinguistic cues.
Outline

1. Introduction & core assumption

2. The empirical phenomenon

3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics

4. Explaining the three main characteristics

5. Conclusion
2.1. The Quality-suspending kind

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

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

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

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

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

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(5) A: Bonjour!
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Main characteristics of the Quality-suspending kind (Gunlogson 2008):
  - question-likeness, e.g., uncertain truth, inviting “yes”/“no” answer;
2.1. The Quality-suspending kind

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

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

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

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

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- **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.)*  
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2.2. Main characteristics (1/3): question-likeness

(2)  A:  *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
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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.
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(9) a. This is a beautiful sunset.
    b. (?) Is this a beautiful sunset?
(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*

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\[(8) \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad '\text{Is it raining}', \text{ she wondered/asked.} \\
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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)  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?
b. You’re a member of the Communist party?
2.3. Main characteristics (2/3): speaker bias

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(10) *(At a committee hearing:)*
   a. Are you a member of the Communist party?
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▶ In (2) the source of the bias is *contextual evidence*;
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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):

(11) *(On the phone with Schiphol information.)* [from Beun 2000]

Caller: Hello. I have to go to Barcelona, from Amsterdam.
Can you tell me which flights leave next Sunday?
Agent: Just a moment. ... Yes, there are several flights. One
leaves at 9.10, one at 11.10, and one at 17.30.
Caller: The flight takes about three hours?
2.4. Main characteristics (3/3): badness out-of-the-blue

(2)  
A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
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(2) A: *(Enters with an umbrella.)*
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(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.)*
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(12) *(With no contextual setup:)*
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    b. The weather’s supposed to be nice this weekend?
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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:

*(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?

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.
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Final rise on declarative would:
- express incompleteness, contingency, open-endedness etc.; (many)
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- makes it a polar question (bipartition); (Farkas & Roelofsen, 2017)
- expresses a request to assert. (Krifka 2017)

Offensively brief review:
- most don’t generalize to other rising declaratives (or beyond);
- most don’t try to explain all three characteristics;
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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
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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Badness out-of-the-blue:
Preview of the explanations

[SPOILER ALERT]

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

Speaker bias:

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Preview of the explanations

[spoiler Alert]

Question-likeness:
- suspending Quality entails uncertain truth;
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Speaker bias:
- one may risk violating Quality only if the risk is sufficiently small;

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

[SPOILER ALERT]

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Preview of the explanations

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- 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’.
Preview of the explanations

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- suspending Quality entails uncertain truth;
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[SPOILER ALERT]

**Pragmatics:**

**Question-likeness:**
- suspending Quality entails uncertain truth;
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Building primarily on:

▶ Grice 1975 (1989): sentence meaning vs. speaker meaning;
3.1. What are maxims, anyway?

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- Grice 1975 (1989): sentence meaning vs. speaker meaning;
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3.2. Illustration

(14) 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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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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- these details were put into place to *fit* intonation;
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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.

- 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.
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For *the* maxims (as defined) this occurs only in certain circumstances.
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3.5. Interim summary

A common methodology:

- explain speaker behavior in terms of their goals & beliefs;

Once we take (intonational) compliance marking into account:

- the subdivision ceases to be ‘merely methodological’;
- 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.
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▶ explain speaker behavior in terms of their goals & beliefs;
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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
4.1. The explanations in a nutshell
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Question-likeness:

Speaker bias:

Badness out-of-the-blue:
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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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Hence the speaker is uncertain about the truth.

(*: How would an addressee figure this out?)
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(*) How would an addressee figure this out?)

(**: Why? (Assuming QUDs *aren’t* generally closed under negation...))
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- ...or assert its negation.

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

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Suppose Quality is twice as important as Relation...
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▶ exp. reward = 2 \times \text{prob(intent is true)} + 1 \times \text{prob(intent } \in \text{QUD)}
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Suppose Quality is twice as important as Relation...
- exp. reward = 2 × prob(intent is true) + 1 × prob(intent ∈ QUD)
- suspend Quality to ensure compliance with Relation:
  exp. reward = 2 × prob(intent is true) + 1 × 1;
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- exp. reward = 2 × prob(intent is true) + 1 × prob(intent ∈ QUD)
- suspend Quality to ensure compliance with Relation:
  exp. reward = 2 × prob(intent is true) + 1 × 1;
- violate Relation to ensure compliance with Quality:
  exp. reward = 2 × 1 + 1 × 0;
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so: suspend Quality only if prob(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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When this doesn’t hold, we expect to see bias-free rising declaratives...
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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?
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(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?

(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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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...
4.5. Badness out of the blue (2/3)

Suspending a maxim is only one way of dealing with a clash; an alternative is *opting out*:
4.5. Badness out of the blue (2/3)

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- 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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- rising declaratives are fine if the QUD is already on the table;
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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...
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- in the latter case, making a tentative informational contribution, even one which suspends Quality, is preferred.

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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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);
- in the latter case, making a tentative informational contribution, even one which suspends Quality, is preferred.

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?
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  ▶ expressing or avoiding ownership of the QUD;
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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’;
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\[ 16 \]

\begin{align*}
A: & \quad (\text{Enters with an umbrella.}) \\
B: & \quad a. \text{ It’s raining?} \\
& \quad b. \text{ Is it raining?}
\end{align*}

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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?