

Non-canonical subjunctive and future questions in Italian

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In recent literature questions have been split into two categories, ‘canonical’ questions and ‘non-canonical’ questions (Dayal 2019, Farkas 2020, 2022); the former are questions conveying a request of information whereby at least three conditions hold: (i) a speaker is not knowledgeable about the resolution of the question (‘speaker ignorance condition’), and she (correctly) assumes (ii) that the addressee knows the information requested (‘addressee competence’), (iii) that the addressee will provide the information requested in the immediate future w.r.t. the speaker’s request (‘addressee compliance’), and (iv) that the issue will be settled in the immediate future w.r.t. the speaker’s request (‘issue resolution goal’); non-canonical questions are interrogative acts where one or more of these assumptions are not met.

Recent studies on Italian ‘presumptive’ future (Ippolito, Farkas 2022) or ‘evidential/non-predictive’ future (Frana, Menéndez-Benito 2023) have also focused on the properties of non-canonical questions where presumptive future is employed, such as (1):

- (1) *Sarà* *arrivata?*
AUX.FUT-3SG arrived
‘Has she arrived, I wonder.’

Presumptive future questions (henceforth, FQ) have been analyzed in the literature as ‘conjectural’ questions (Eckardt, Beltrama 2019), in that by uttering questions like (1) the speaker assumes that the addressee lacks competence and the addressee does not have direct evidence to resolve the issue (Mari 2010, Eckardt, Beltrama 2019, Frana, Menéndez-Benito 2023).

The problem. In Italian another type of non-canonical questions having a *prima facie* presumptive flavor are subjunctive questions (SQ), exemplified in (2).

- (2) *Che sia* *partita?*
That AUX.SUBJ.3SG left
‘Has she left, I wonder.’

Similarly to FQs, SQs also express – to put it informally – the ‘best guess’ about an issue: in uttering both sentences (1) and (2) the speaker assumes that the addressee is not knowledgeable about the issue under discussion (‘lack of competence scenario’, Ippolito, Farkas 2022); thus for both FQs and SQs the ‘addressee competence’ condition is suspended. Because of this they are *not* appropriate in scenarios where the addressee is assumed to have direct evidence to resolve the issue (see (3)) (as well as in ‘quiz’ scenarios and rhetorical questions, for that matter).

- (3) a. # *Avrai* *fame?* b. # *Che tu abbia* *fame?*
 have.FUT-2SG hunger That you have.SUBJ-2SG hunger
 ‘Are you hungry, I wonder.’ ‘Are you hungry, I wonder.’

Despite these similarities, SQs differ from FQs in considerable aspects: First, in contexts where the speaker assumes that the addressee is knowledgeable and yet the resolution of the issue is postponed (for instance in written communication; see Ippolito, Farkas 2022), FQs are acceptable (see (4a)), whereas SQ are not (see (4b)).

- (4) CONTEXT: Chiara is writing a letter to a friend who lives far away and whom she hasn’t seen for a long time. She writes:

- a. *Soffrirai* *ancora di quei fastidiosi mal di testa?*
suffer-FUT-2SG still of those annoying headaches
‘Do you still suffer from those annoying headaches, I wonder.’
- b. # *Che tu soffra* *ancora di quei fastidiosi mal di testa?*
That you suffer-SUBJ.2SG still of those annoying headaches
‘Do you still suffer from those annoying headaches, I wonder.’

This suggests that, while in uttering an FQ the speaker accepts that the settlement of the issue can be postponed, this is not the case when uttering an SQ; in other words, the ‘issue resolution goal’ condition can be suspended in uttering an FQ though not an SQ.

Second, in an ‘evidence-neutral context’ (Frana, Menéndez-Benito 2023) FQs are acceptable, while SQs are odd:

(5) CONTEXT: The speaker’s husband is away at war. She has not heard from him in months. She knows that the addressee cannot possibly have any information about her husband. However, seeking comfort, she asks:

- a. *Sarà sano e salvo?* b. # *Che sia sano e salvo?*
 be.FUT-3SG safe and sound That be.SUBJ.3SG safe and sound
 ‘Is he safe and sound, I wonder.’ ‘Is he safe and sound, I wonder.’

Thus, while in uttering an FQ the speaker assumes that the Addressee is ignorant about the issue, because she has no evidence in favor of one or the other settlement; on the other hand, in uttering an SQ the speaker assumes that the Addressee has some evidence, whatever it is, though example like (2)b excludes that direct evidence is involved.

To account for these data I follow Farkas’s (2020, 2022) proposal on ‘non-intrusive questions’, which builds on the semantics and conventional discourse effects (CDEs) of interrogatives (Condoravdi, Lauer 2012, Farkas Roelofsen 2017). Following Farkas (2020), I assume that (i) the denotation of a sentence is a set of propositions I , called an *issue*; (ii) the informative content of an issue I ($info(I)$) is $\cup I$, the union of the propositions in I ; in the case of declarative sentences I contains a unique alternative p while in the case of interrogatives it contains more than one alternative (assuming a Hamblin-style semantics for interrogatives); (iii) when a sentence is uttered, it affects the context structure c ; c can be represented via a ‘table’ including the discourse commitments of speaker (DC_{Sp}) and addressee (DC_{Ad}), a set of issues awaiting resolution, and a set of future commitments, the projected set (ps); ps captures the notion that a conversational move drives the conversation toward particular future states.

Finally I propose that an additional component must be added, in order to account for the speaker’s assumptions on the addressee’s epistemic access to informative content: $\{p^x, \neg p^x\}$ is a set of propositions in I such that the speaker assumes that the addressee has indirect evidence to commit to them; $\{p^o, \neg p^o\}$ is a set of propositions in I such that the speaker assumes that the addressee does not have any evidence to commit to them.

I propose that the CDEs of an SQ can be represented as (6): by uttering (2) the speaker drives the verbal exchange toward a conversational state in which the addressee can provide conjectural evidence in favor of one of the alternatives $p, \neg p$; the CDEs of an FQ are represented in (7): by uttering (1) the speaker projects a future state in which the addressee’s doxastic state is not implicated and the issue remains unresolved.

(6)	DC_{Sp}	Table	DC_{Ad}
	$info(I)$	$\{p^x, \neg p^x\}$	
		$ps: \{DC_{Ad} \cup \{p^x\}, DC_{Ad} \cup \{\neg p^x\}\}$	
(7)	DC_{Sp}	Table	DC_{Ad}
	$info(I)$	$\{p^o, \neg p^o\}$	
		$ps: \{DC_{Ad} \cup \{info(I)\}\}$	

Selected references. Condoravdi, Lauer 2012. The basic dynamic effect of interrogative utterances. Presented at TLS 2012. Eckardt, Beltrama 2019. *Evidentials and questions*. In *Empirical issues in syntax and semantics 12*. Farkas 2020. *Canonical and non canonical questions*, unpublished ms. Farkas 2022. *Non-Intrusive Questions as a Special Type of Non-Canonical Questions*, *Journal of Semantics* 39. Frana, Menéndez-Benito 2023. *The evidential future in Italian*. *NLS* 31. Ippolito, Farkas 2022. *Assessing alternatives: The case of the presumptive future in Italian*. *L&P* 45. Mari 2010. *On the evidential nature of the Italian future*. HAL archives.