

# Question Answer Pairs (QAPs) in Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL)



Linghui Eva Gan  
(linghui.gan@uconn.edu); Department of Linguistics, University of Connecticut



## Introduction

**Question Answer Pairs (QAPs)** are widely attested across sign languages. It's also been referred to as 'wh-cleft' or 'rhetorical questions' (Baker and Cokely 1980; Baker-Shenk 1985; Wilbur 1996).



Q(uestion)-clause      A(nswer)-clause

(1)  $\overline{\text{GLADYS LIKE WHAT, BOOK}}$   
'What Gladys bought was a book.'

The focus is expressed in the clause-final A-clause

- QAP provides a good place to investigate semantics/syntax interface in sign languages.

- In this study, I discuss:
  - The syntactic properties of QAPs in HKSL
  - The semantic properties of A-clause in HKSL

- Data:
  - 1) naturalistic monologue by 2 Deaf L1 signers (30 min);
  - 2) fieldwork judgment data from 4 Deaf L1 signers

## Syntactically, QAPs in HKSL display mixed clausal properties

- Some QAPs behave like one single syntactic unit.

- Quantifier Scope ambiguities are attested in QAPs;*

(2)  $\overline{\text{MAN ALL LIKE WOMAN ONE.}}$   
'Every man likes one woman.'



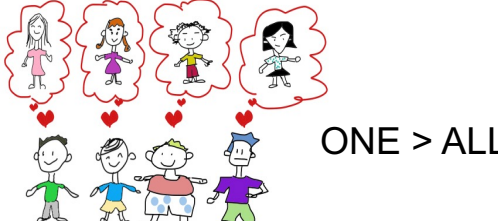
MAN ALL LIKE WOMAN ONE  
(a) For every man  $x$  there is a woman  $y$  such that  $x$  likes  $y$ . (ALL > ONE)  
(b) There is a woman  $y$  such that every man  $x$  likes  $y$ . (ONE > ALL)



(3)  $\overline{\text{MAN ALL WHAT, LIKE WOMAN ONE.}}$   
'Every man likes a woman.'



MAN ALL WHAT LIKE WOMAN ONE  
(a) For every man  $x$  there is a woman  $y$  such that  $x$  likes  $y$ . (ALL > ONE)  
(b) There is a woman  $y$  such that every man  $x$  likes  $y$ . (ONE > ALL)



- Q-clause and the A-clause cannot be intervened by a hinge;*

(4) (a)  $\overline{[3/4] ? \text{POSS-3 FATHER LIKE MALE FEMALE WHICH, BOY, BAD.}}$   
'What her father prefers is male, which is bad.'  
(b)  $\overline{[0/4] * \text{POSS-3 FATHER LIKE MALE FEMALE WHICH, BAD, MALE.}}$

- Subject WHO must be final in the Q-clause, indirectly indicating the syntactic dependency between Q-clause and A-clause.*

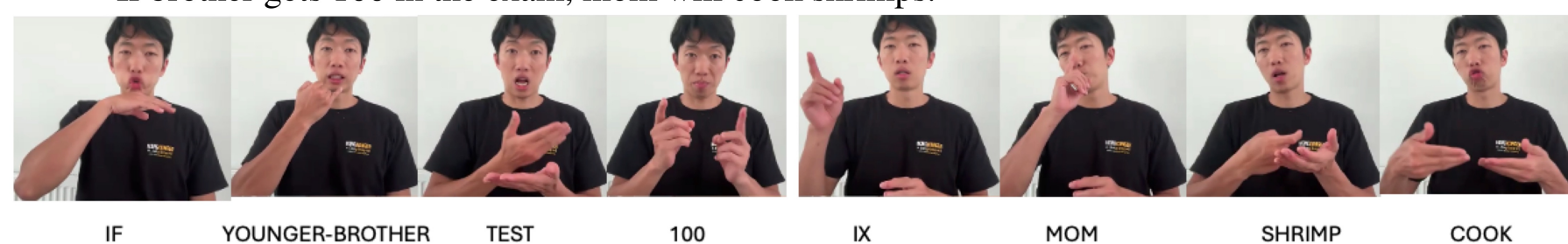
- Some QAPs behave like discourse-level question and answer combinations (for some signers).

- Binding of SELF;*

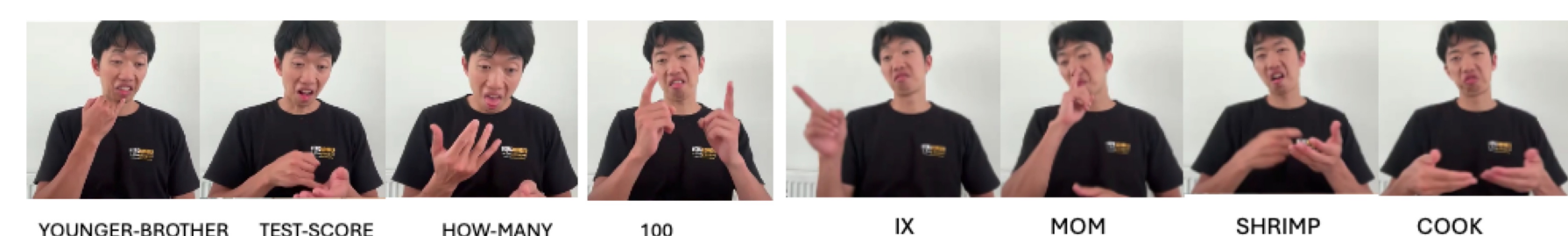
(5) (a)  $\overline{[4/4] \checkmark \text{MOM SAY SELF BUSY.}}$  (6) 'Mom<sub>i</sub> said that she<sub>i</sub> is busy.'  
'Mom said that she (herself) is busy.'  
(b)  $\overline{[0.25/4] * \text{SELF BUSY.}}$  (b)  $\overline{[2/4] \% (??) \text{MOM}_i \text{ SAY WHAT, SELF}_i \text{ BUSY.}}$   
Intended: 'I am busy.' (%: inconsistent judgements)

- QAPs in conditionals;*

(7)  $\overline{[(\text{IF}) \text{YOUNGER-BROTHER TEST ONE-HUNDRED, IX MOM COOK SHRIMP.}]}$   
'If brother gets 100 in the exam, mom will cook shrimps.'

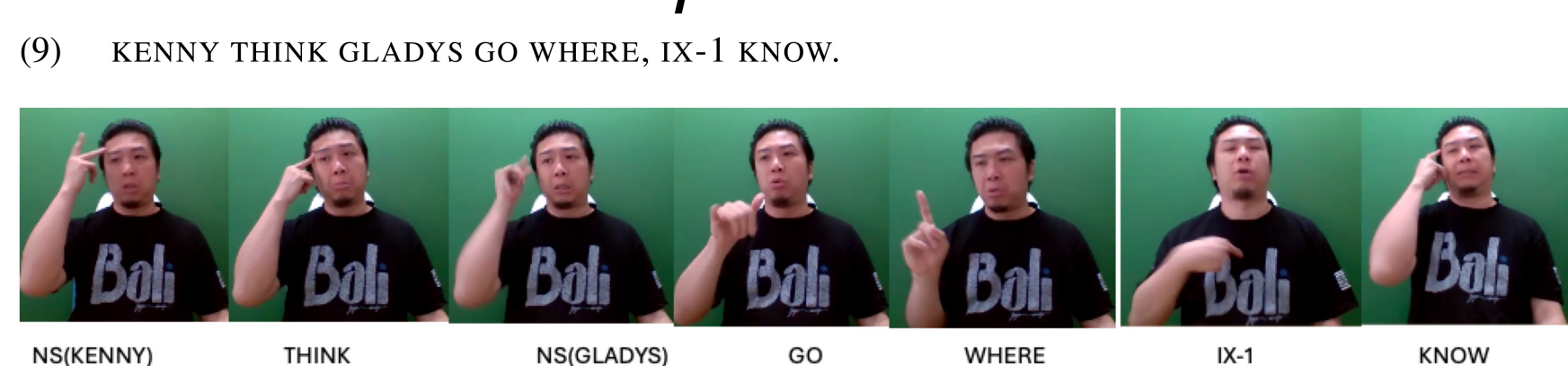


(8)  $\overline{[3.25/4] \% (?) [\text{QAP YOUNGER-BROTHER TEST SCORE HOW-MANY, ONE-HUNDRED}], \text{IX MOM SHRIMP COOK.}}$   
(%: inconsistent judgments)



Signers A B C D  
Scores given 4 1 4 4

- Indirect report with an embedded QAP.*



(a) % 'Kenny is thinking about that I know where Gladys went.'  
(%: One signer accepts this reading.)  
(b) 'I know where is Kenny thinking about Gladys went.'

Both within-signer and across-signer differences are attested w.r.t. judging QAPs as one single syntactic unit

	signer A	signer B	signer C	signer D
inverse scope in QAP	n.a.	✓ (1 clause)	✓ (1 clause)	n.a.
SELF	✓ (1 clause)	* (2 clauses)	✓ (1 clause)	* (2 clauses)
conditional	✓ (1 clause)	* (2 clauses)	✓ (1 clause)	✓ (1 clause)
embedded QAP	* (2 clauses)	✓ (1 clause)	* (2 clauses)	* (2 clauses)
(✓: grammatical; * ungrammatical; n.a.: not applicable)				

Table 1: Summary of judgments from different consultants

## Semantics properties of QAPs in HKSL

- QAPs in HKSL can be predicational.

- One major argument against equating QAPs to wh-clefts is that predicational QAP is not possible (e.g., LSF) (Hauser 2018). In HKSL, predicational QAP is allowed (11).

(10) [English]

- (a) The person who is in charge is Aaron. (specificational)  
(b) The person who is in charge is smart. (predicational)

(11)  $\overline{\text{IN-FACT YESTERDAY HAPPEN WHAT INDIVIDUAL IX WRONG.}}$   
In fact, about the incident that happened yesterday, it was that individual's fault.'



IN-FACT YESTERDAY HAPPEN WHAT INDIVIDUAL IX WRONG

- The A-clause is not always exhaustive.

(12) A and B are close friends. A saw B's husband C shopping at the mall yesterday. What C bought was a book, a cake, and a ring. B knows what C bought. Today, A and B were chit-chatting. B said:

- (a)  $\overline{\text{YESTERDAY IX-I HUSBAND BUY WHAT, BOOK, CAKE, RING.}}$  (mention-all)  
'Yesterday my husband bought a book, a cake, and a ring.'  
(b)  $\overline{\text{YESTERDAY IX-I HUSBAND BUY WHAT, RING.}}$  (mention-parts)  
'Yesterday my husband bought a ring.'  
(c)  $\overline{\text{YESTERDAY IX-I HUSBAND BUY WHAT, BOOK, CAKE.}}$  (mention-one)  
'Yesterday my husband bought a book, and a cake.'



- (13) (a) *Context 1 (neutral):* B talked about C's shopping.  
(b) *Context 2 (highlight the surprise):* B thought the husband was going to buy a book and a cake, and the ring turned out to be a surprise. B wants to share with A about the surprise.  
(c) *Context 3 (not-mentioning the ring):* B mentioned C's shopping but doesn't want to mention the ring to make a big deal of it.

	mention-all	mention-parts	mention-one
Context 1 (neutral)	✓		
Context 2 (highlight the ring)	#	#	✓
Context 3 (ignore the ring)		✓	

Table 2: Acceptability judgments of (12) under different contexts (13)

Whether the A-clause is exhaustive, mention-parts, or mention-some depends on the intension of the speaker in the discourse context.

## Discussion

- The structure of QAP aligns with the "pragmatic presupposition ~ predicate (focus) sequence";

- The pragmatic subject (Lambrecht 1994) always locates in the Q-clause and the pragmatic predicate (i.e., the focus) always locates in the A-clause in QAPs

(14)  $\overline{\text{EVA LIKE EAT WHAT, FISH.}}$  (15)  $\overline{\text{LIKE EAT FISH WHO, EVA.}}$   
'What Eva likes to eat is fish.' 'The person who likes to eat fish is E.'  
Presupposition: "Eva likes to eat something  $x$ " Presupposition: "Someone  $x$  likes to eat fish"  
Assertion: " $x$  = fish" Assertion: " $x$  = Eva"  
Focus: "FISH" Focus: "EVA"  
Focus domain: A-clause (NP) Focus domain: A-clause (NP)

- Focus occupying the clause-final position is related to the prosodic saliency of the sentence (Gan, in prep; Wilbur 1996, 1997, 2012).

## REFERENCES

- Scan the QR code for full list of bibliography.



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