

Content questions in context: *wh*-syntax and pragmatics in Catalan Sign Language (LSC)

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Wh-questions in signed languages

- In the study of *wh*-questions (content questions), particular emphasis has been given so far to the directionality of *wh*-movement and its syntactic representation.
- Little attention has been given to **non-canonical varieties of *wh*-questions** and to the interpretive specificities and conditions of use of some of the possibilities attested.

Goals:

- extend the account of biased yes/no questions in LSC (cf. Cañas 2021) to content questions
- show that not only non-manuals but also marked syntax flags non-canonical questions.

Types of non-canonical *wh*-questions in LSC

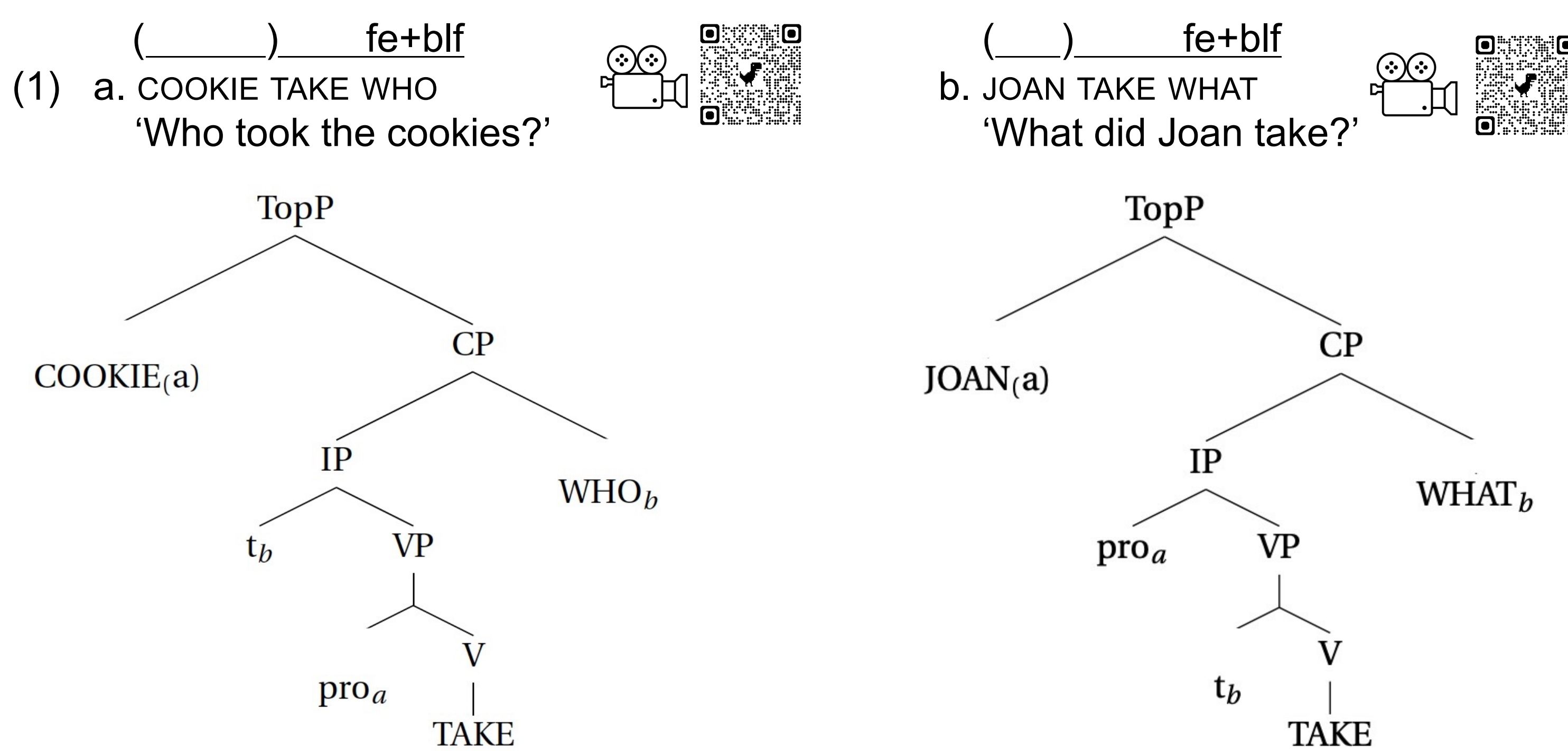
- (i) **in situ *wh*-questions** are restricted to the use as echo-questions;
- (ii) **doubling structures** with the *wh*-sign at the left and right edges of the clause or in situ and rightward-moved *wh*-structures are interpreted as surprise-disapproval questions;
- (iii) **clefted** subject or object *which*-questions are used in contexts where subject and object are of the same (animate) type and are strongly presuppositional.

LSC data: elicitation with emphasis on context with 2 native signers.

Neutral content questions

They are purely information-seeking:

- Rightward movement of the *wh*-expression towards the Spec,CP to the right
- Non-manual markers: furrowed eyebrows (fe) and head/body lean forward (blf)
- Furrowed eyebrows and head/body lean forward are coarticulated with the *wh*-constituent and V or the VP manual material, and eventually over the subject or object constituent as well.

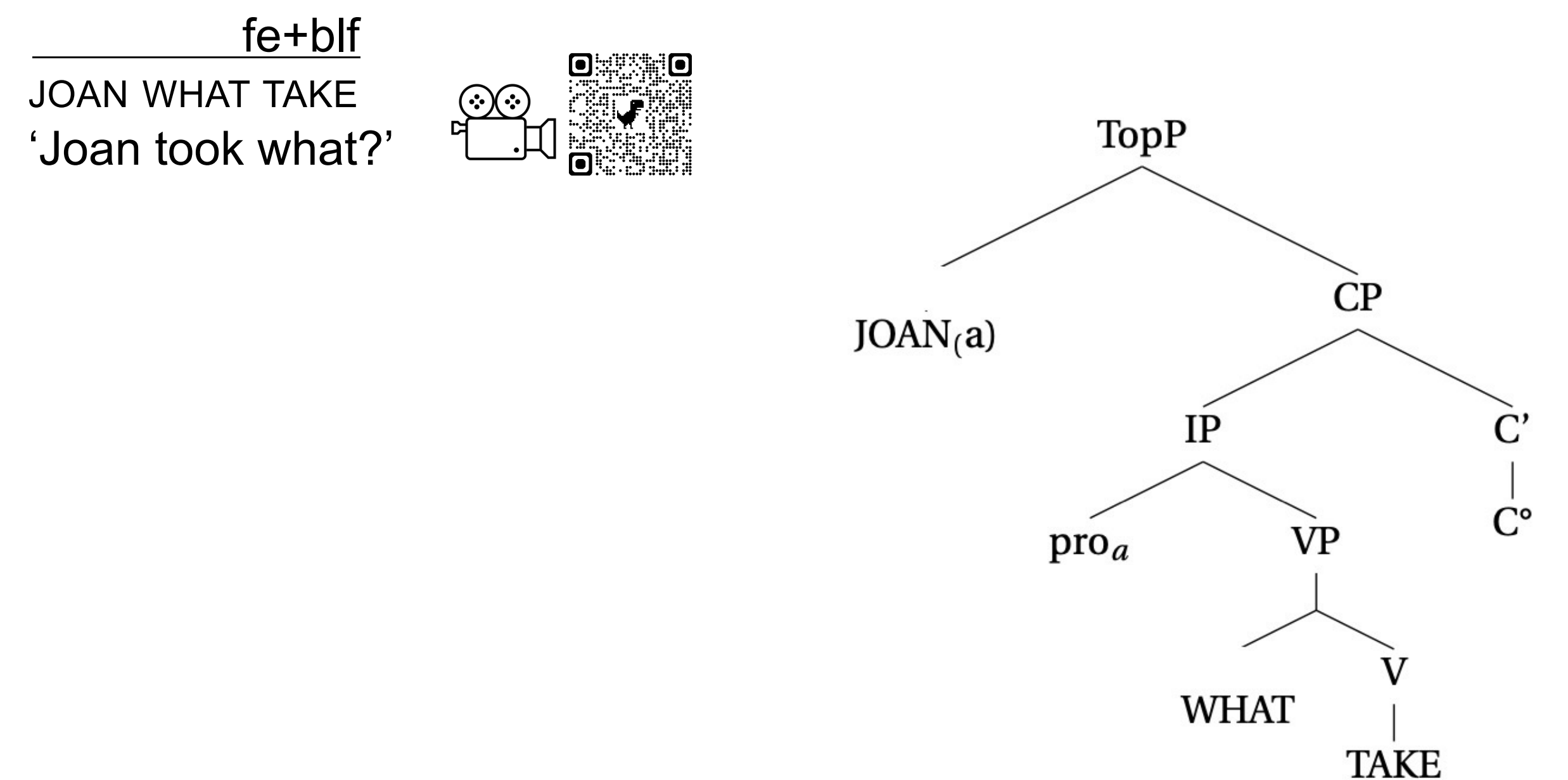


Wh-in situ as echo questions

They are used as echo questions:

- Wh*-non-manual markers must obligatorily appear over the whole clause (vs. neutral content questions)
- They are used for asking for a clarification about a particular constituent
- They can express surprise with respect to the preceding utterance
- Following Sobin (2010), there is no covert movement of the *wh*-constituent.

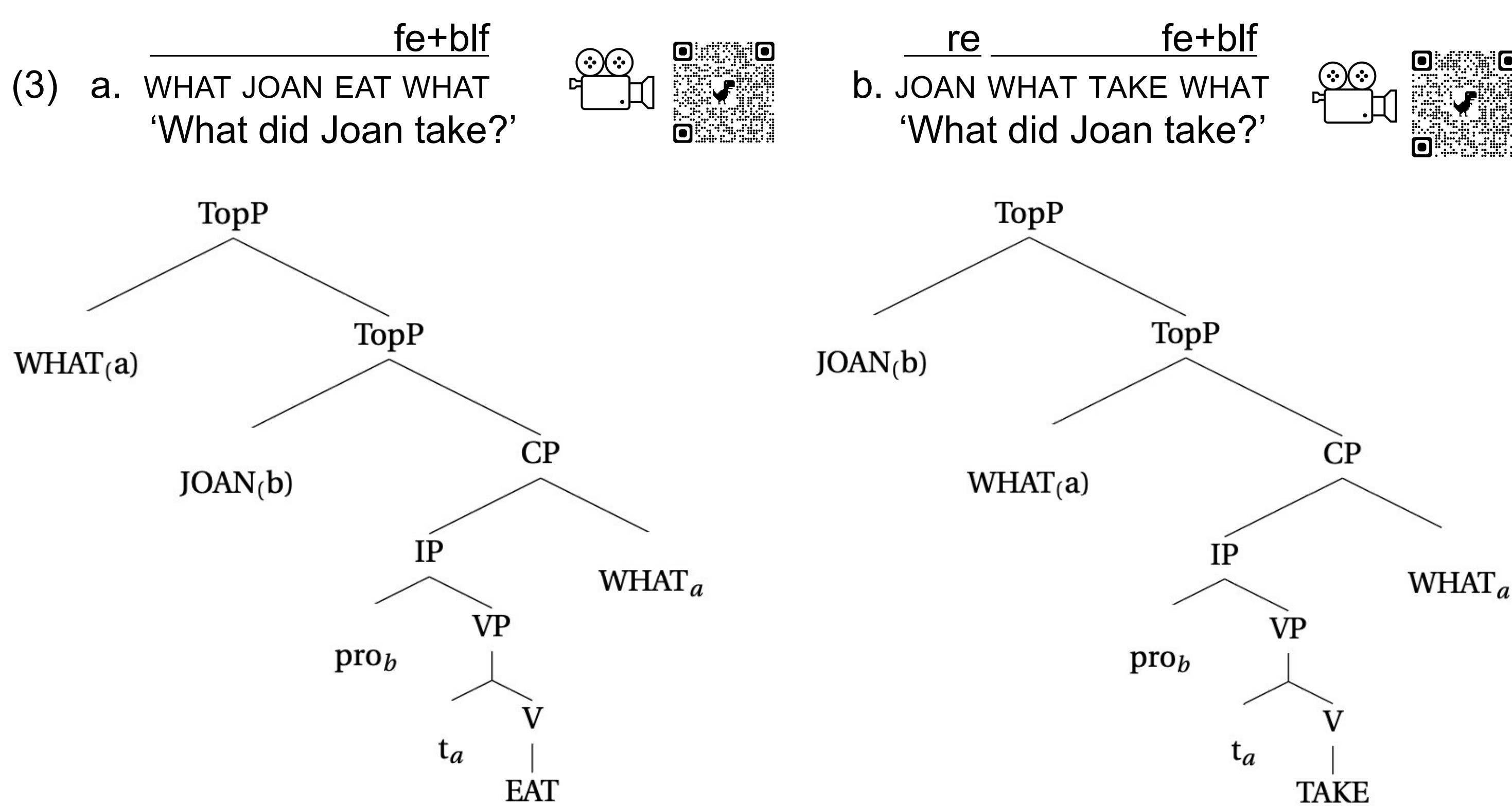
(2) Context: Mary: "At the lunch buffet, Juan took [unclear]."



Doubling structures

They are non-canonical questions expressing surprise or disapproval as a reaction to the preceding utterance (cf. Trotzke 2023):

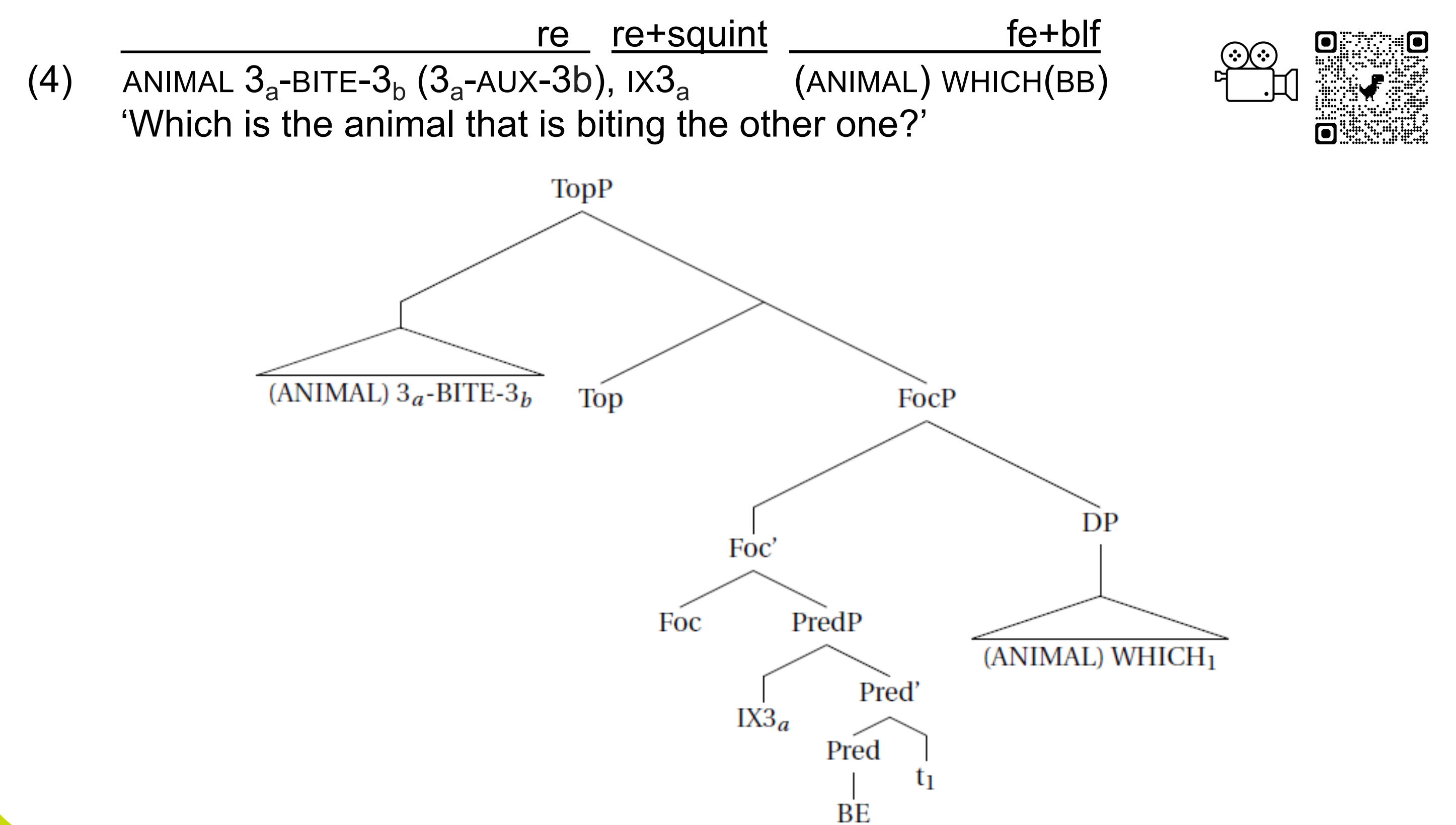
- Non-manuals obligatorily perseverate between the initial and the final *wh*-sign
- The first *wh*-sign is analyzed as a topic and it is D-linked to the corresponding constituent in the previous utterance.



Clefted questions

They are subject/object *which*-questions with two animate arguments of the same type:

- Existential presupposition, D-linked
- Bi-clausal structure formed by a topic clause and a *wh*-copular clause (cf. Abner 2011)
- Wh*-movement happens within the copular clause



Conclusions

- Looking into the licensing conditions of use and the interpretations of *wh*-interrogatives helps better understand the specificities of non-canonical questions.
- Non-canonical questions are instances of different kinds of contextual and speaker biases.
- Non-canonical questions are encoded by:
 - non-canonical behavior of *wh*-non-manuals
 - the different syntax that encodes each type of non-canonical *wh*-question.

References

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