Disjunctive questions and the syntax/semantics interface: evidence from Hungarian

Y/N questions are traditionally divided into polar questions (PQ) and alternative questions (ALTQ) (Collins 2006). When Y/N questions contain a disjunctive phrase, they often become ambiguous between the PQ and the ALTQ readings (Rooy&Šafarova 2003, Han&Romero 2004a,b, Romero&Han 2003a,b, Eckardt 2007):

(1)   Did Peter buy tea or coffee?/   **PQ**
(2)   Did Peter buy TEA/ or COFFEE\?   **ALTQ**

Recently a further subclass of Y/N questions, disjunctive questions (DISJQs) has been identified by authors like Haida (2011) and Biezma (2009). DISJQ differ from ALTQs in their *(i)* structure, *(ii)* interpretation, and *(iii)* syntactic derivation;

(i)   *Structure*
(3a)   Did Peter buy [CHEESE/ or BUTTER\]?   **ALTQ**
(3b)   Did Peter buy [cheese or not]?
(4a)   [Did Peter buy cheese] or [did he buy butter]?   **DISJQ**
(4b)   [Did Peter buy cheese] or [did he not]?

(ii)   *Interpretation*
While in the case of ALTQs the speaker is committed to the truth of the propositions in either of the two conjuncts, DISJQs involve no similar commitment.

(iii)   *Syntactic derivation*
●   The Coordination+Ellipsis analysis does not give satisfactory results in the case of affirmative conjuncts (see Hudson 1976):
(5) John and Mary are twins. <≠ *John is a twin and Mary is a twin.
●   The Coordination+Ellipsis analysis cannot explain the distributional differences of *whether* in ALTQs vs. DISJQs:
Susan wants to know ….
(6a)   whether Peter drank the milkshake *or* (*whether) the coke.   **ALTQ**
(6b)   whether Peter drank the milkshake *or* (*whether) not.
(7a)   whether Peter drank the milkshake *or* *(whether) he drank the coke.   **DISJQ**
(7b)   whether Peter drank the milkshake *or* *(whether) he did not.
●   The Coordination+Ellipsis analysis does not explain the intervention effect imposed by the NEG operator, blocking the INT-QCL chain in the negative conjunct of Hungarian subordinate DISJQs and the absence of intervention effects in positive conjuncts:
(8)   Zsuzsa szeretné   tudni,……
        Susan would_like   know.INF
        a.   [$_{CP}$ hogy [$_{ForceP}$ vajon INT Péter el-jön-*e*]]   a buli-ba

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    that   whether   Peter   PFX-comes-QCL   the party-into

    vagy [CP (hogy) [ForceP (vajon) INT nem jön-(*-e)   el *pro*]].
    or   that   whether   NOT comes-(*QCL) PFX (he)
    'Susan would like to know whether Peter is coming to the party or whether he is not
    coming.'

  b. [CP hogy [ForceP vajon INT   Péter   el-jön-*e*]]   a buli-ba
      that   whether   Peter   PFX-comes-QCL   the party-into

    vagy [CP (hogy) [ForceP (vajon) INT   TV-t   néz-e   *pro*]]
    or   that   whether   TV-ACC watches-(QCL) (he)
    'Susan would like to know whether Peter is coming to the party or whether he is
    watching TV.'

Beck&Kim (2006) report similar intervention effects in English, German, Korean and Hungarian ALTQs: association between the licensing INT operator and the disjunctive phrase is blocked by intervening operators such as NEG, ONLY and EVEN.

3   The facts listed in **(i)-(iii)** argue in favour of the Conjunction Reduction+Extraction analysis (over the Coordination+Ellipsis via OP-movement analysis (contra Han&Romero 2004a,b). Hungarian subordinate disjunctive questions show intervention effects, similar to those attested in *wh*-questions and alternative questions. This necessitates an extension of Beck&Kim's (2006) local disjunction+alternative sets analysis to DISJQs, given that intervention effects are incompatible with OP-movement.

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