

# The Right Frontier in the QUD Framework

The right frontier constraint (RFC) says that the last discourse segment and any segments it is subordinated to are, in its strong version, the only ones available, and in its weaker version more available for attachment of new discourse segments and for anaphoric reference. In relational theories of discourse structure, such as SDRT (Segmented Discourse Representation Theory, Asher and Lascarides, 2003), to be subordinate means to be connected by one of a list of subordinating coherence relations, such as *Elaboration* or *Explanation* to another segment. The same generalisation can be captured in a framework based on discourse goals or questions under discussion (QUD, e.g. Roberts, 1996; Ginzburg, 2012; Onea, 2016, among others) using the notion of a stack. If subordination is associated with pushing a new question on top of the stack, and only discourse segments addressing the topmost question are open for attachment and anaphoric reference, then it would seem that both theories should make the same predictions with respect to the set of phenomena associated with the RFC.

We argue that the QUD treatment of the RFC performs better than SDRT in two kinds of cases. First, the apparent equivalence of the approaches hinges on the assumption that the topmost QUD can be popped off the stack any time to make the superordinate discourse segment available for attachment and reference. However, this does not seem to be the case if the topmost QUD has not been sufficiently addressed. In the following example, (1-b) is an *Elaboration* of, i.e. is subordinate to (1-a). Therefore, according to RFC in SDRT, (2-d) should be able to attach either to (1-b) or to (1-a), giving rise to two readings: (a) the restaurant visit or (b) the two things the speaker did on Friday took 3 hours; similarly, either (a) Bill also went to his/my favourite restaurant, or (b) he also did two things on Friday. However, we have a strong intuition that, respectively, only the first of these two readings is available. Compare this to (2), which has both readings. We argue that this is because in (1), the mention of “two things” leads to pushing two subordinate QUDs on top of the stack, what is the first thing and what is the second, and since the second question is not addressed yet, it cannot be popped off the stack, and the superordinate segment (1-a) is not accessible.

- (1) a. I did two things on Friday.  
b. I had dinner at my favourite restaurant.  
c. That took 3 hours. / Bill did too.
- (2) a. I did two things on Friday.  
b. I went for a walk,  
c. and I had dinner at my favourite restaurant.  
d. That took 3 hours. / Bill did too.

The second group consists of cases where the information structure of the sentences (esp. delimitation and contrastive topic marking, Krifka, 2008) signals a certain arrangement of QUDs on the stack, which constrains the anaphoric possibilities, compare (3) and (4). The SDRT version of the RFC predicts no difference, since the examples have the same configuration of the discourse graph resulting from subordination relations between the segments.

- (3) a. The weekend was great.  
b. On Saturday, John went skiing.  
c. On Sunday, he went to the gym.  
d. Mary did too. Preferred: Mary went to the gym on Sunday.
- (4) a. The weekend was great.  
b. JOHN (L+H\*LH%) went skiing on Saturday.  
c. And he went to the gym on Sunday.  
d. MARY (L+H\*LH%) did too. Preferred: Mary did both things.

**References:** Asher and Lascarides 2003. *Logics of Conversation*. Ginzburg 2012. *The interactive stance*. Krifka 2008. Basic notions of information structure. Onea 2016. *Potential Questions at the Semantics-Pragmatics Interface*. Roberts 1996. Information structure in discourse: Towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics.

## References

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