3. Ziele und Arbeitsprogramm

3.1. Ziele

The overall goal of the network is to work towards to a better understanding of the nature of questions as linguistic and semantic objects and the role of questions in the interpretation of natural language. The network focuses on three distinct aspects of this complex interaction. First, we discuss the role of implicit and explicit questions in the realization and interpretation of information structure. Second, we discuss the role of implicit questions in discourse structuring, in the interpretation of discourse particles, in the projection properties of presuppositions and in related phenomena. Finally, keeping in mind the insights from the first two investigations, we turn to the more general question of how questions and questions answer paradigms should be formally modeled, and how to distinguish between different types of questions: implicit, explicit, embedded, concealed etc. The general aim of the network is to achieve a certain consensus on these questions in a joint effort.

There are more practical aims as well:

I.   The results of the discussions shall be documented in a set of joint publications. In particular, there will be a larger theoretical paper providing an overview of the theoretical problems arising with questions in discourse and the possible solutions to these problems. In addition, there will be a number of papers on particular empirical phenomena in which questions in discourse are used as a tool for semantic/pragmatic analysis. In order to ensure maximal quality of these papers we intend to publish them in a special issue of a major international journal.

II. The meetings shall not only concentrate on the general theoretical questions raised above but also help to identify areas in need of further theoretical and/or empirical inquiry, such as the interpretation of discourse particles, association with focus, questions and discourse relations etc. At least some of these fields, which remain to be identified in more detail and to be discussed at the meetings, will be tackled in future joint projects resulting in grant proposals both with the German Science Foundation (DFG) and in international research programs. It is expected that especially the junior researchers will highly benefit from these future collaborations.

3.2. Arbeitsprogramm

The tasks of the research network will be tackled in a way that maximally exploits the expertise of the senior researchers and guests involved. In particular we divide the research program into three packages which will be tackled in two sessions each.

Package A: Questions and information structure.
Package B: Questions and discourse structure.
Package C: Implicit and explicit questions.

While the delimitation of these packages is surely not trivial, the general idea is to start with some clearly identifiable empirical effects and the way in which they are analyzed using questions under discussion and questions hierarchies. The relation between information structure and questions under discussion is the best analyzed and hence, delivers a natural starting point. The theoretical question we wish to pursue in this respect is to what extent implicit questions are indeed the correct way of understanding the notions of focus and

(contrastive) topic. In particular, the assumption that focus signals the implicit question under discussion, as wide-spread as it may be, leads to complicated assumptions about locally accommodated questions that are difficult to be overtly expressed. In this package we also wish to address the question of whether the newly advocated distinction between at issue meaning and non-at issue meaning should be thought of in terms of focus-background and thus directly related to implicit questions, or in some independent but possibly related terms.

In the second step, we wish to consider the theoretical benefits and problems of structuring discourse by means of question hierarchies, which are partly motivated by considerations from information structure (Büring 2003). For one thing, we wish to compare the existing analysis of discourse particles in question-based discourse models with other competing analyses. In addition, we wish to discuss the relation between question-based discourse models and discourse models based on discourse relations, such as SDRT. One particular question we have in mind is to explore to what extent these two kinds of discourse representation can be thought of as being compatible, or even equivalent. This also leads to a theoretical discussion about the way in which overt questions relate to implicit questions in discourse structuring, and more generally to the question of how the new way of thinking about questions in inquisitive semantics relates to more elaborate discourse models.

We expect that some general consensus can be achieved in these first two packages, at least concerning particular subquestions.

The third package is theoretically more involved in the sense that we wish to address the issue of formal representation of questions and question-answer paradigms. There are a number of issues to be resolved: the relation between implicit and explicit questions, the modeling of concealed questions, the question of whether and to what extent questions are exhaustive, and, last but not least, the compositional derivation of the semantic value of questions. In this connection, the syntactic representation of questions needs to be addressed as well. Unlike with the first two packages, we would already consider it a large benefit of this part of the scientific program, if we succeed in gathering existing positions, raising new questions and achieving a deeper understanding of the theoretical implications of particular ways of treating questions as semantic objects.

Each of the three research packages will be discussed in two separate stages. In the first (introductory) meeting of each package, there will be two larger overview presentations, followed by a round table discussion led by two senior researchers. In these discussion sessions, particular questions will be addressed by the participants in small 15 minute position papers, followed by extensive discussion. The aim of the introductory meetings is to develop a maximal understanding of the problems in that particular area by the participants and to profit from the different perspectives of the various members of the network. The second meetings will be organized in the form of a workshop in which there will be time to focus on the particular research of the participating members and non-members. These workshops will be essential for the goal of publishing concrete results in the form of one or more special issues of important international journals, such as *Theoretical Linguistics*, *Lingua*, etc. Each introductory meeting will last for two days, and each workshop for three days. Two additional experts will be invited to each meeting. The choice of the additional experts to be invited will depend on current publications in the field in most cases.