A typology of non-selective interrogative pronominals: formal and functional differentiation and issues in diachrony

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Non-selective interrogative pronominals (NIPs): ‘who?’ & ‘what?’

(1)  a. *Who* is that man over there?
    b. *Who* gave you this?

(2)  a. *What* is this thing you have in your hand?
    b. *What* fell out of his bag?

vs. selective interrogative pronominals (SIPs), such as *which one*?
What can be interesting about NIPs?

(besides their syntax)
What’s interesting: semantics

- In English, both *who*? and *what*? can be used in questions about a person
Semantics & cross-linguistic diversity

- Russian vs. Standard Average European:
  - only ‘who?’ about a person
  - but ‘who?’ also about animals (even insects…)

- Grammars are usually silent on the semantics of the NIPs
  (actually, they tend to be misleading about it: abuse of the label “animate”)

Formal differentiation

- Why do we (English, Russian, Chinese...) actually have two different NIPs ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ after all?

  - questions are asked about something we don’t know, so why make it more difficult to ourselves than it has to be?

  - although common, this differentiation is actually not universal
Formal differentiation: less distinctions

- \( \approx 5\text{-}7 \% \) of the world’s languages do not make the distinction (based on the sample of ca. 1850 languages)


a. *Qui qu’est venu?*
   *who that-is come*
   ‘Who came?’

b. *Qui qu’tu manges?*
   *what that-you eat*
   ‘What are you eating?’

NB: Similar situation in Middle and Classical French (13\textsuperscript{th} to 17-18\textsuperscript{th} centuries) and several North American French creoles.
Formal differentiation: less distinctions

Modern French attributive *quel* ‘which, what (kind of) [N]?’ vs. predicative *quel* ‘what/who [is N]?’

a. *quel* est cet *arbre*?
   IPW.M.SG is DEM.M.SG tree[M.SG]
   ‘What tree is this/that? (lit.: ‘What is this/that tree?’)’

b. [A: Vous me conterez tout cela. Je m’attends bien à du nouveau; mais en vérité je n’en veux pas encore. Comme ce lavoir est petit! autrefois il me paraissait immense; j’avais emporté dans ma tête un océan et des forêts, et je retrouve une goutte d’eau et des brins d’herbe.]
   *Quelle* est donc cette *jeune* *fille*
   IPW.F.SG is PTCL DEM.F.SG young.F.SG girl[F.SG]
   [qui chante à sa croisée derrière ces arbres?]
   [B: C’est Rosette, la soeur de lait de votre cousine Camille.]
...less than expected distinctions

- NIPs are commonly defective with respect to the morphosyntactic categories typically available for nominals in a given language:
  - no plural marking and/or agreement
  - no gender marking on the NIP and/or no variability of gender assignment
  - defective and/or reduced case paradigms
  - limitations on the accessible syntactic slots
  - etc.
Formal differentiation: more distinctions

- a few languages make more distinctions

Tucano (Eastern Tucanoan; Brazil & Colombia; Ramirez 1997:328-332)

- *noá* ‘who? (human SG or PL)’
- *yẽ’é* ‘what? (inanimate SG or PL)’
- *yamí* ‘what? (non-human AN.M.SG)’
- *yamó* ‘what? (non-human AN.F.SG)’
- *yamârã* ‘what? (non-human AN.PL)’
How can we define an NIP for purposes of cross-linguistic comparison?

1. N + I + P
Pronominal

- a morphologically non-bound substitute of a nominal, which itself does not need to be a nominal

- **substitute**: the interrogative pronominal X is used to inquire about a certain referent, which in the answer to the question will be expressed by the nominal Y.

NIPs are a kind of **suspensive pronominals** ("pronoms suspensifs", van den Eynde & Mertens 2003:70), since their referential specification is suspended

English attributive *which [N]?*, *what [N]??*
Pronominal

- morphologically-bound

Tapanta Abaza (Northwest Caucasian; Russia)
bound interrogative root -a

a. *wə-z-zə-pʃə-wa-jə?
   2SG.M[S]-PTCP.OBL-APPL-look-PTCP.IPFW-3SG.NON<HUM>.S-IPW
   ‘What are you looking for? (lit.: ‘The one that you are looking for, it is who/what?’)’

b. *wə-z-zə-pʃə-wa-d-a?
   2SG.M[S]-PTCP.OBL-APPL-look-PTCP.IPFW-3SG.HUM.S-IPW
   ‘Who are you looking for? (lit.: ‘The one that you are looking for, s/he is who/what?’)’

Indo-European bound interrogative roots

*kwːi-, *kwːo-, *kwːe-, *kwːa-
Pronominal

- a morphologically non-bound substitute of a nominal, which itself does not need to be a nominal

- conventionalized nominal phrases:

Pronominal

- a morphologically non-bound substitute of a nominal, which itself does not need to be a nominal

  - conventionalized clausal constructions:

Apurucayali Asheninca (Arawakan; Peru; Payne et al. 1982:230)

(1) **o-i-t-a-ri-ka**

3F-name-EP-NON<FUT>.REFL-REL-Q 3M-do-FUT-REL

‘What will he make?’

Tapanta Abaza (Northwest Caucasian; Russia; Genko 1955:105-106)

(2) **d-z-a-čwə-j-a?**

3SG.HUM.S-PTCP.OBL-3SG.NON<HUM>.OBL-belonging.to[AOR]-3SG.NON<HUM>.S-IPW

‘who?’
Interrogative

- **interrogative construction**: a linguistic construction dedicated to eliciting information

- **constituent question** (content question, information question, etc.): a question that asks for an instantiation of variable $x$ for the presupposition *It is known that (possibly) HAPPEN/EXIST ($\ldots x \ldots$)*

- **interrogative proform** must have the function of a request for an instantiation of the nominal variable $x$ as one of its conventionalized functions
Selective vs. non-selective

- **selective**: the speaker perceives the choice as being restricted to a closed set of alternatives

(1)  *Which (one) should I take? This, that, or maybe that?*

- **selective interrogative pronominals** = interrogative pro-deictic nominals (pro-nominal demonstratives)
Selective vs. non-selective

- **non-selective**: the speaker *perceives* the choice as being *free*

(2) *What have you liked most about this book?*
(3) *Who do you see there?*
Selective vs. non-selective

- the speaker perceives…: the border between selective and non-selective is not always clear-cut

  - when the choice is asked to be made between entities of different kinds

French (Matthew 23:17)

  a. Insensés et aveugles! lequel est le plus grand, l'or, ou le temple qui sanctifie l'or? (Louis Second 1910)

  b. Insensés et aveugles que vous êtes! Qu'est-ce qui est plus important: what is more important l'or ou le Temple qui rend cet or sacré? (La Bible du Semeur)
Selective vs. non-selective

- **multifunctionality:**
  - common ‘who?’ for ‘which one (person)?’
  - common ‘which one?’ for ‘who?’
  - rare ‘what?’ for ‘which one (thing)?’
  - rare ‘which one?’ for ‘what?’

  a. *All these women here... and who/which is Mary?*
  b. *All these cars here... and which/what is yours?*
How can we define an NIP for purposes of cross-linguistic comparison?

2. Semantics of NIPs: additional parameters
Entity type

- PERSON vs. NON-PERSON (THING)

“...we have the possibility of sometimes treating inanimate entities as persons and, perhaps less often, human beings as non-persons, in one sense or another”

(Dahl & Fraurud 1996:62)
Entity type

“animacy is just one of the many distinctions that can be made along the scale of SELF vs. OTHER”

(Janda 1996:325)

Figure 1. “The barest default contours of the SELF-OTHER continuum” (Janda 1996:326)

| SELF/FIGURE | > | > |
| SELF | > HUMANS | > HUMANS |
| PERSON LIKE SELF | NOT LIKE SELF |
| > ANIMALS | > SMALL, |
| | DISCRETE, |
| | COUNTABLE |
| | CONCRETE |
| | OBJECTS |
| THING | > | > |
| > OTHER | > PARTS OF |
| | OBJECTS |
| | > MASSES |
| | AND |
| | COLLECTIVES |
| | > LANDSCAPE |
| | FEATURES |
| | > OTHER/GROUND |
| | AMBIENT |
| | INTANGIBLES |
| | AND |
| | ABstractions |
Type of reference

- **identification**: direct reference
- **classification**: reference via a concept
Expected answer

- **proper name**: a lexeme “assigned to an *ad hoc* referent in an *ad hoc* name-giving act” (Van Langendonck 2007:6)

- **common noun**: a description
(1) [Persons A and B see person X. Person B appears to be familiar with X. Person A asks:] Who is this?
   a. [B:] It’s John.
   b. [B:] It’s my brother/ my doctor.
   c. [B:] It’s the doctor.
   d. [B:] It’s a doctor.

(2) [Persons A and B see thing X. Person B appears to be familiar with X. Person A asks:] What is this?
   a. [B:] It’s my boomerang/ my neighbour’s cherry-tree.
   b. [B:] It’s a boomerang/ a cherry-tree.
   c. [B:] It’s the boomerang/ the cherry-tree.
NIPs: from a typological perspective

For purposes of cross-linguistic comparison, NIPs, ‘who?’ and ‘what?’, are best defined through their functions in terms of prototypical (or canonical) combinations of values of three parameters (cf. Idiatov 2007):

- entity type
- type of reference
- expected answer
NIPs: from a typological perspective

Figure 1. Conceptual space for delimiting the prototypical functions of non-selective interrogative pronominals

Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENTITY TYPE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TYPE OF REFERENCE</td>
<td>PERSON (DIRECT REFERENCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPECTED ANSWER</td>
<td>PROPER NAME (DESCRIPTION, APPELLATIVE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHO? WHAT?

Interrogative pronominal
- [person + classification + common noun] (KIND-questions)

Russian

(1) A on *kto* voobsche? Vrach?
and he *who* actually doctor
‘What is he actually? A doctor?’

English vs Russian: preference to different parameters

English: TYPE OF REFERENCE → what?-dominance

Russian: ENTITY TYPE → who?-dominance
[thing + identification + proper name] (NAME-questions)

Kgalagadi (Niger-Congo, Bantu S30; Botswana; Kems Monaka, p.c.)

(1) [A:] libizho la lehelo lo ke anye? name of place this is who

[B:] ke Hughunsi is Hukuntsi

‘[A:] What (lit.: ‘who?’) is the name of this place? 
[B:] It’s Hukuntsi (a village name)’

English: ENTITY TYPE → what?-dominance

Kgalagadi: TYPE OF REFERENCE & EXPECTED ANSWER → who?-dominance
Figure 2. Conceptual space for non-selective interrogative pronominals
Some complications:

- a language may choose a different strategy in different contexts even when the combinations of values in these contexts are the same

Vietnamese (Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Viet-Muong; Vietnam; Thu Thi Anh Nguyen, p.c.)

[A:] Mary là gì*/ai của bạn?
Mary is what/*who of you

[B:] Chỉ ấy là chị dâu của tôi
she is sister-in-law of me

‘[A:] What is Mary to you? [B:] She is my sister-in-law.’
Some complications:

- many languages treat non-human living beings similarly to humans in various respects and some also use ‘who?’ in questions about them (ANIMATE-questions)

Russian

(1) *Kto* eto tebjja ukusil? *Osa?*  
who this you bit wasp  
‘[Looking at a swelling on someone’s hand clearly caused by an insect bite:] *What* stung you? A wasp?’
`Who?`/`what?`-dominance in cases of non-canonical combinations of values: a typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KIND-questions [person + classification (+ common noun)]</th>
<th>NAME-questions [thing + identification (+ proper name)]</th>
<th>Prominence</th>
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<tr>
<td>1  <code>who?</code></td>
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<tr>
<td>2  <code>who?</code></td>
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<td>4  <code>what?</code></td>
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‘Who?’/‘what?’-dominance in cases of non-canonical combinations of values: a (full) typology

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<td>‘what?’</td>
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<td>‘what?’</td>
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<td>mixed (4/2a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>‘what?’</td>
<td>‘who?’</td>
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NAME-questions
Questions for proper names

such a question may or may not involve an interrogative pro-word (IPW)

Bamana (Mande; Mali)

(1) Í tógɔ̀?
2SG name.ART
‘What’s your name?’

constructions involving an IPW with a non-canonical combination of values:
[thing + identification + proper name] (NAME-questions)

constructions involving an IPW

• [IPW is X’s name?] an equation between an IPW and X’s name
• [IPW is X (by name)?] an equation between an IPW and X (by name)
• [IPW is X(’s name) named/called?] a non-equational construction with a verb of naming/calling
[IPW is X’s name?]

Kgalagadi (Niger-Congo, Bantu S30; Botswana; Kems Monaka, p.c.)

(1)  [A:]  *libizho la lehelo lo keanye?*
       name of place this is *who*

       [B:]  *ke Hughunsi*
       is  Hukuntsi

‘[A:]  *What* (lit.: ‘*who?’’) is the name of this place?
[B:]  It’s Hukuntsi (a village name)’
[IPW is X (by name)?]

Tuvaluan (Austronesian, Remote Oceanic, Nuclear Polynesian; Tuvalu)

(1)

a. \textit{ko-oi} \textit{tou} \textit{fenua}?
   FOC-who 2SG.POSS island
   ‘What’s your home island?’ or ‘What’s your native country?’ (lit.: ‘Who (is) your island?’) (Besnier 2000:422)

b. \textit{ko-oi} \textit{t-tino} \textit{naa}?
   FOC-who DEF.SG-person that
   ‘[Addressed to someone in the dark:] Who is there? (lit.: ‘Who (is) that person?’)’ (Besnier 2000:424)
[IPW is X named/called?]

German

(1) **wie** heißt **er**?
**how** is.named **he**
‘What’s his name? (lit. ‘How is he named?’)

(2) Semelai (Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Aslian; Malaysia)

a. **kadeh** **glor**?
   **who** **be.named**
   ‘What are (you) called?’, ‘What is your name?’ (Nicole Kruspe, p.c.)

b. **kadeh** **na-tə?en**?
   **who** **DEM-to.down**
   ‘Who is the one (coming) down?’ (Kruspe 1999:293)
“Avoidance” strategies

- in the case of a non-canonical combination of values, the use of both ‘what?’ and ‘who?’ can be avoided altogether

  - ‘how?’

    German

    (1)  
    wie heißt er?
    how is.named he
    ‘What’s his name? (lit. ‘How is he named?’)

    Arabela (Zaparoan; Peru; Rolland Rich, p.c.)

    (2) [A:]  
    taa-te quia sesa-ni? [B:] John
    how -Q 2SG name-Q PROP
    [A:] What is your name? (lit.: ‘How is your name?’) [B:] John’
“Avoidance” strategies

- In the case of a non-canonical combination of values, the use of both ‘what?’ and ‘who?’ can be avoided altogether.
  - ‘where?’

  Standard (Eastern) Hausa (Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic; Nigeria)

(1)  \textit{in\textipa{a}} suuna-\textipa{n-ka}?
\textit{where} name-of-2SG

‘What is your name? (lit.: ‘Where is your name?’)’ (Paul Newman, p.c.)
“Avoidance” strategies

- in the case of a non-canonical combination of values, the use of both ‘what?’ and ‘who?’ can be avoided altogether

  - ‘which one?’

    Amharic (Afro-Asiatic, West Semitic; Ethiopia; Seyoum Mulugeta, p.c.)

      (1) som-əh yätənnaw näw?
      name-2SG which-one.M.SG COP.M.SG
      ‘What is your name? (lit.: ‘Which one is your name?’)’

  - predicative ‘which?, what kind of?’

    French

      (2) quel est son nom?
      which[M.SG] is his name
      ‘What is his name? (lit.: ‘Which is his name?’)’
NAME-questions: ‘who?’ vs. ‘what?’

- when no avoidance strategy is recurred to in the case of a non-canonical combination of values, we have either ‘what?’-dominance or ‘who?’-dominance

Namia (Sepik-Ramu, Sepik, Yellow River; Papua New Guinea; Becky Feldpausch, p.c.)

(1) [A:] *ne-k(a) ilei tal(a)*? [B:] John
   2SG-POSS name who PROP
[A:] *What* is your name? [B:] John’
NAME-questions: personal proper names

- clearly, the most common context with ‘who?’-dominance in NAME-questions in the languages of the world

Map 1. The distribution of languages allowing ‘who?’ in NAME-questions about personal proper names
NAME-questions: proper names of domestic animals

Angami Naga (Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Kuki-Chin-Naga; India; Giridhar 1980:36)

(1)  a. ū zâ šūpuò gā?
    your name who Q
    ‘What is your name?’ (lit.: ‘Who is your name?’)

    b. ū fâ zâ šūpuò gā?
    your dog name who Q
    ‘What is the name of your dog?’ (lit.: ‘Who is the name of your dog?’)

- a given linguistic community must have domestic animals and these must be considered to be important enough to be given proper names
- possible only in languages where ‘who?’ can be used in NAME-questions about personal proper names
- through the assimilation of domestic animals to humans in some respect, i.e. their personification
NAME-questions: proper names of places

- much less common
  and very much restricted both geographically and genetically

- [Who is X (by name)?]: Oceanic branch of Austronesian & the Bantu language Ngombe

(1) Tuvaluan (Austronesian, Remote Oceanic, Nuclear Polynesian; Tuvalu)

a. ko-oi tou fenua?
   FOC-who 2SG.POSS island
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(1) [A:] *libizho la lehelo lo ke anye?*
   name of place this is who

   [B:] *ke Hughunsi*
   is Hukuntsi

   ‘[A:] What (lit.: ‘who?’) is the name of this place?
   [B:] It’s Hukuntsi (a village name)’

[Who is X’s name?] and [Who is X named?): for all named places, irrespective of their relation to humans

Poligus Evenki (Altaic, Northern Tungusic; Konstantinova 1968:73)

(2) *ər bi:ra ŋi: ərbi:-n?*
   this river[NOM] who name-3SG.POSS

   ‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is the name of this river?’
NAME-questions: temporal proper names

According to Van Langendonck (2007:225-231), temporal names indicating points or periods in time, such as Monday or May, can function as proper names.

[Who is X (by name)?]: Nuclear Polynesian subgroup of Austronesian (only for the names of months)

Tuvaluan (Austronesian, Nuclear Polynesian, Samoic-Outlier; Tuvalu; Besnier 2000:423)

(1)  a. ko-oi te maasina e fano ei koe?
    FOC-who DEF.SG month NON<PST> go ANAPHORIC 2SG
    ‘What month are you leaving in?’ (lit.: ‘Who is the month you are leaving?’)

  b. ko te maasina o oi e fano ei koe?
    FOC DEF.SG month of who NON<PST> go ANAPHORIC 2SG
    ‘What month are you leaving in?’ (lit.: ‘It is the month of who that you are leaving?’)

Rapa Nui (Austronesian, Nuclear Polynesian, East; Chile; Du Feu 1996:22)

(2)  ko-ai te ava’e ko tara hao hai vanaga tire?
    FOC-who ART month FOC January INS language Chile
    ‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is January in Spanish?’
NAME-questions: temporal proper names

- [Who is X (by name)l?]: Nuclear Polynesian subgroup of Austronesian (only for the names of months)

- The names of months are the only kind of temporal names that belongs to the special morphosyntactic class of proper names: marked by a “personal article”

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{i a hora iti} & \quad \text{‘in August’} \\
\text{in PERSONAL} & \quad \text{August} \\
\text{i te mahana piti} & \quad \text{‘on Tuesday’} \\
\text{in SPECIFIC} & \quad \text{Tuesday}
\end{align*}
\]
NAME-questions: names of “folk genera” (species)

Subiya/Kuhane (Niger-Congo, Bantu K50; Namibia & Botswana; Ndana Ndana, p.c.)

(1)  a. i-zina  lye  lyi  samu  njeni?
    AUG-name of this tree  COP.who
    ‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is the name of this tree?’

    b. i-lyi  samu  lyi  sumpwa  ni?
    AUG-this tree  it.is.called  who
    ‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is this tree called?’

(2)  Libido (Afro-Asiatic, Highland East Cushitic; Ethiopia; Joachim Crass, p.c.)

    a. ka  hakk’an  summi  ’aye?
    this tree.GEN  name.NOM  who
    ‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) is the name of this tree?’

    b. ka  hakk’a  ’aye  yaka’o?
    this tree.ACC  who  they.say
    ‘What (lit.: ‘who?’) do they call this tree?’
NAME-questions: pure autonyms

- Pure autonyms are **metalinguistic names**, i.e. linguistic expressions that refer to themselves, such as *stand for* and *about* in the phrase *the words ‘stand for’* and *‘about’* (cf. Van Langendonck 2007:246-249).

- In many respects autonyms behave like proper names and should be considered as “a **subclass of proper names** in their own right” (Van Langendonck 2007:95, 246-249).

Hadendowa Bedawi/Beja (Afro-Asiatic, North Cushitic; Sudan)

(1)  
\[
\begin{array}{llllll}
\text{oo-tam} &  ?aab &  eedna &  t-’arabyeet-iib? \\
\text{ART.M.SG.ACC-sorghum.ball} & \text{who.ACC} & \text{say.IPV.3PL} & \text{ART.F.SG-Arabic-in} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘What is sorghum ball in Arabic? (lit.: ‘Who do they call sorghum ball in Arabic?’)’ (Martine Vanhove & Mohamed-Tahir Hamid Ahmed, p.c.)

Libido (Afro-Asiatic, Highland East Cushitic; Ethiopia; Joachim Crass, p.c.)

(2)  
\[
\begin{array}{llll}
\text{libitt’isan} & \text{“sheep”-a} & \text{’aye yaka’o?} \\
\text{Libido.language.in} & \text{“sheep”-ACC} & \text{who} & \text{they.say} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘What is sheep in Libido? (lit.: ‘Who do they call sheep in Libido?’)’
NAME-questions: some generalizations

- ‘who?’-dominance hierarchy in NAME-questions: personal proper names (& proper names of domestic animals) < place names < (temporal proper names) < names of folk genera < pure autonyms

- with every step to the right, the number of languages involved reduces drastically, i.e. with a magnitude of several times

- on the world-wide scale, there are 3 major foci of ‘who?’-dominance in NAME-questions:
  
  • Bantu and Cushitic languages in Africa
  • Austronesian languages in Asia and the Pacific
  • Pama-Nyungan languages in Australia
Explaining the use of ‘who?’: personal proper names

Namia (Sepik-Ramu, Sepik, Yellow River; Papua New Guinea; Becky Feldpausch, p.c.)

(1) [A:] ne-k(a) ilei tal(a)? [B:] John
   2SG-POSS name who
   [A:] What is your name? [B:] John’

- It is the **categorical presuppositional meaning** of the proper name expected as an answer, viz. the fact that it is a proper name of a person (or a personified entity), that is metonymically taken into account
Explaining the use of ‘who?’: toponyms, etc.

- An explanation appealing to the categorical presuppositional meaning of proper names cannot be extended to account for the use of ‘who?’ in questions for names whose categorical presuppositional meaning is not a person (or at least a personified being, as in the case of domestic animals, deities and the like), such as toponyms, temporal names, folk genera and autonyms.
Explaining the use of ‘who?’: toponyms, etc.

- A **synchronic explanation** of propriality: the use of ‘who?’ is due to the proper name status, propriality, of these nouns.
  - questions for personal proper names involve the use of ‘who?’ due to the categorical presuppositional meaning of the personal proper names
  - the language has a clear morphosyntactic class of proper names containing both personal and non-personal nouns
  - by analogy, questions for non-personal proper names also involve the use of ‘who?’

- This explanation may work for the Austronesian languages with a special **morphosyntactic class of proper names** marked by a “personal article”

- Elsewhere, such explanation is much more problematic due to the very abstract nature of its semantic basis, viz. propriality, which is supposed to override the **semantic clash** between the very concrete categorical presuppositional meanings of the personal and non-personal proper names.
Explaining the use of ‘who?’: toponyms, etc.

- A diachronic explanation: the use of ‘who?’ is due to a concurrence of certain developments in the evolution of the IPWs
  
  - on an earlier stage, a selective (or locative) interrogative indifferent to the semantic opposition person vs. non-person was used in questions about (personal & non-personal) proper names to avoid the use of ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ (avoidance strategy)
  
  - this selective (or locative) interrogative has developed into ‘who?’, as is not uncommon cross-linguistically
  
  - as a result, questions for (personal & non-personal) proper names involve the use of ‘who?’
Cushitic (a branch of Afro-Asiatic)

- **avoidance strategies** are not uncommon in NAME-questions in Afro-Asiatic

  Standard (Eastern) Hausa (Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic; Nigeria)

  (1) **inaa** *suuna-n-ka?*
  **where** name-of-2SG
  ‘What is your name? (lit.: ‘Where is your name?’)’ (Paul Newman, p.c.)

  Amharic (Afro-Asiatic, West Semitic; Ethiopia; Seyoum Mulugeta, p.c.)

  (1) **səm-əh** *yäōppaw nāw?*
  **name-2SG** **which.one.M.SG** COP.M.SG
  ‘What is your name? (lit.: ‘Which one is your name?’)’

- Beja ‘who?’ *ʔaːb* (ACC), *ʔaw* (NOM) is a reflex of Proto-Cushitic *ʔayy- ‘**which one**?’.

- Compare also Saho (East Cushitic) *ay ~ aː* ‘who?, what?, which [N]?, what (kind of) [N]?’, Proto-Cushitic *ʔay(y)u-da ‘where?’*, (primarily) South Omotic *ʔay ‘who?*, (primarily) North Omotic *ʔay-(b-) ‘what?’*, and Proto-Semitic *ʔay ‘where?’*. 
Bantu (a branch of Niger-Congo)

- **avoidance strategies** are not uncommon in NAME-questions in Bantu and Niger-Congo

  Eton (Niger-Congo, Bantu A71; Cameroon; Van de Velde 2008:179)

  (1) pèpá wɔ ãŋábé ɗwé yá?
  |pèpá ú-ɔ à-ŋá-bé d-ồ d já|
  father I-your I-RP-COP 5-name how
  ‘How was your father called?’

- As discussed in Idiatov (2009), Bantu ‘who?’ interrogatives commonly reconstructed as *n(d)a(n)i have developed out of a **selective interrogative** ‘which one?’ and ultimately a **locative interrogative** construction *[AG9(or AG7) COP G16-‘what?’].

  - In several Bantu languages of zone C, reflexes of this interrogative construction mean both ‘who?’ and ‘what?’
Conclusions

- The use of ‘who?’ in questions for personal proper names supports the relevance of the notion of **categorical presuppositional meanings** of proper names.

- **Propriality** can account only for a small part of cases of the use of ‘who?’ in NAME-questions for non-personal proper names in the languages of the world.

- A **diachronic explanation** of the use of ‘who?’ in NAME-questions (especially, about very marginal kinds of proper names, such as names of “folk genera” and pure autonyms) is more adequate and should be preferred all things being equal.