

## Non-human animates and non-selective interrogative pronominals

oral

In this paper, I examine the cross-linguistic variation in the use of non-selective interrogative pronominals, such as English *who?* and *what?*, in questions about non-human animates, i.e. non-human biologically living entities. For purposes of cross-linguistic comparison, I define the non-selective interrogative pronominals ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ as idealizations resulting out of the interaction between several parameters (viz. entity type, type of reference, and expected answer) within a single conceptual space. Thus, the prototypical interrogative ‘who?’ is an interrogative pronominal asking for the identification of a person and expecting a proper name as an answer. The prototypical interrogative ‘what?’ is an interrogative pronominal asking for the classification of a thing and expecting a common noun as an answer. The opposition between humans and things involved in this typology is also of paramount importance for the so-called animacy hierarchy. Non-human animates occupy an intermediate position on the animacy hierarchy, but with respect to this typology, most languages, like English, treat them as things by selecting the interrogative ‘what?’ in questions about them. Only a small minority of languages has been found to assimilate non-human animates to humans by selecting ‘who?’, as in (1) from Russian.

- (1) *Kto eto tebja 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?’

In both groups, however, the in-between status of non-human animates is still manifested indirectly in that many languages are reported to tend to avoid using ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ altogether in questions about non-human animates. Finally, a few languages, such as Kaibab Southern Paiute (Uto-Aztecan) and Tucano (Tucanoan), appear to have to a special non-selective interrogative pronominal for non-human animates distinct from both ‘who?’ and ‘what?’.

In my talk, I will focus on languages using ‘who?’ or a special non-selective interrogative for non-human animates. In particular, I will consider in detail (i) their geographical and genetic distribution, (ii) possible correlations with other manifestations of the animacy hierarchy in these languages, as well as (iii) the ways grammatical animacy in the context of a question may differ from grammatical animacy elsewhere in the grammar of such languages.