§1. Compliance. The semantics: Questions are sets of (possibly overlapping) possibilities. In the strictest sense, then, an answer provides exactly one of those possibilities. Compliance nicely captures this strictest notion of an answer: Somewhat roughly, compliant responses either rule out or get us some way toward ruling out some of the possibilities—the more ruled out, the more compliant the response.

An analogue of Grice’s maxim of relevance: Be compliant.

§2. Non-compliant responses are not always bad. This maxim needn’t replace Grice’s relevance, of course, but certain non-compliant responses seem similar in kind to compliant responses—they all seem relevant in a loose sense. Now that we’re drawing a sharp distinction between answers in the strictest sense and other responses, it would be good to have an explanation of why these non-compliant responses are not bad (without relying on relevance loosely, since that would cover the compliant responses as well).


(1) Will Alf go to the party?
   a. Will Bea go?
   b. He’ll go if Bea does. / If Bea does, yes. (But if not, who knows.)

(2) Was the die roll odd?
   a. Well, it wasn’t a 1 or a 3.
   b. Well, it wasn’t a 1 or a 2.

Of course, these replies aren’t as good as compliant responses. But they are still straightforwardly helpful. At any rate, they are better than, say, “Snow is white.”

2.2. Over-informative responses.

(2) Was the die roll odd?
   c. Yes.
   d. Yes, it was a 3.

(3) Is it raining or snowing? (Read as ?!(p ∨ q).)
   a. Yes.
   b. Yes, it’s raining.

From the paper: Over-informative answers are bad because they “always run an unnecessary risk of being unacceptable in the information state of one of the participants.” Two
points:
- It is not always risky, as in (3b). But perhaps this can be explained in the same way (4d) is explained below.
- Sometimes being risky is good. If my reason for believing that it’s odd is that I believe it was a 3, then if you know it wasn’t a 3, we’re going to be a lot better off if I say (2d) than if I say (2c). Again, my main worry is not that a story cannot be told—surely it can—but that such a story might explain why compliant responses are better—that it might undermine the sharp distinction between the compliant and non-compliant responses.

§3. Case studies. Cases where the semantics and attending pragmatics help. Homogeneity comes in: Say more! Ask less!

(4) Will ALF or BEA go to the party? (Read as ?(p ∨ q)—figure (ii).)

a. Alf will go to the party.

b. #Neither Alf nor Bea will go.

c. #Both Alf and Bea will go.

d. Only Alf will go; Bea will not go.

from least to most inquisitive (most to least homogenous)

- \( \varphi \) is at most as inquisitive as \( \psi \) iff in every state (= set of indices) where \( \psi \) is not inquisitive, \( \varphi \) is not inquisitive either.
- \( \varphi \) is inquisitive in a state \( \sigma \) iff there are at least two possibilities for \( \varphi \) in \( \sigma \).
- A possibility for \( \varphi \) in \( \sigma \) is a maximal substate of \( \sigma \) supporting \( \varphi \).

3.1. Not neither.

(5) Will Alf or Bea go to the party? (Read as ?!(p ∨ q)—figure (i).)

The story: Since (5) is less inquisitive than (4), it is more homogenous and thus preferred ceteris paribus; the only reason the initiator would choose (4) is if (5) would not be inquisitive in her information state, and that would only be if she has ruled out \( \neg p \land \neg q \)—if she has ruled out (4b).

Question: Does homogeneity really govern discourse-initial questions as well as responses? On the one hand, asking less makes (compliantly) answering easier, so conversations are more likely to move along. On the other hand, asking less makes (compliant) answers less informative, so conversations are less likely to get very far.

3.2. Not both. Two things to explain: why (4c) is bad and why (4d) is fine, even though it’s over-informative. The story: The second follows from the first. If we can
assume that (4c) is false, then (4a) implies (4d), and so the latter is not really saying more.

Focus on the first step: Why is (4c) bad? The story: \( ?(p ∨ q) \) rules out a response, \( p ∧ q \), which is more informative and thus more homogenous than either \( p \) or \( q \). Why would the initiator exclude this more homogenous response? It must be because \( p ∧ q \) is unacceptable in her own information state.

A new maxim: Ask questions that allow for more homogenous answers. This is, I think, at odds with the Ask less! part of homogeneity. That is, we have another reason for the initiator to exclude \( p ∧ q \) as a response: The way to get \( p ∧ q \) to be a compliant response is, I think, to ask \( ?p ∧ ?q \) (figure (iii)), which is more inquisitive than \( ?(p ∨ q) \). Alternately, take this new maxim on board and we have another explanation for choosing (4) over (5). If we want to hold onto both of these maxims—ask less! and our new maxim—then neither can be strong enough to license the “the only reason the initiator would have asked \( ?(p ∨ q) \) instead of...” moves in the preceding stories.