**INTRODUCTION**

Embedded questions, such as the underlined segment of (1), permit multiple readings relative to knowledge of the answers to (2), as captured in (3).

(1) Mary knows where to find a good cup of coffee.

(2) Where can one find a good cup of coffee?

(3) a. **Strong Exhaustive**: Mary can name both positive and negative answers.
    b. **Weak Exhaustive**: Mary can name all of the positive answers.
    c. **Intermediate Exhaustive**: WE + she has no false beliefs about the negative answers.
    d. **Mention-Some (MS)**: Mary can name (at least) one positive answer.

While previous theoretical accounts focused almost exclusively on (3a-c), more recent theoretical accounts have turned to factors licensing (3d). Three main claims arise from these recent investigations:

**Claim 1 Contextual (pragmatic) licensing**: [1,3,6-8] argue MS must be licensed by the context and should be available whenever it satisfies discourse goals. While (3a-c) are better if (2) is asked by a foodie reviewer for a magazine, (3d) is appropriate if (2) is asked by a tourist in town for a day. Moreover, the felicity of any given MS answer also depends on its relevance to the speaker’s goals. However, contextual goals may not be sufficient to license MS readings. MS is also claimed to be linguistically constrained. [3,4] observe that not all embedded questions allow MS. (4) with who and +FIN appears to resist MS. This observation leads to Claims 2 and 3.

(4) Mary knows who came to the party.

**Claim 2 Lexical licensing**: MS is claimed to depend on the semantics of the embedding verb and the wh-phrase. [2] claims MS is only licensed by ‘psych verbs’ like know, and not communication verbs like predict, which [1] argues should resist MS. While no clear reason why who would block MS, [8] argues that in needing contextual support to specify its granularity, where is more MS-compatible.

**Claim 3 Modal licensing**: [3,5,9,10] argue that –FIN clauses, as in (1) and (4) are analyzed as carrying a covert existential modal, which allows MS, in contrast to +FIN clauses, which lack this modal component. On [10]’s analysis, this modal is licensed when contextual goals are achieved by an arbitrary action. [5] further argues that MS is only possible in ‘modal/existential questions’ with a singleton answer (Mention-One (MO)), and unavailable elsewhere.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To address Claims 1-3, we designed a set of experiments in which we systematically varied these factors and their interaction, clearing the empirical ground for an adequate theory of question-answer interpretation and the licensing of MS readings. In doing so, we targeted the following research questions:

**Q1 (Contextual)**: What is the influence of discourse context? We varied the type of context (speaker goals/intentions) and the ranking of the MS alternatives, predicting that non-exhaustive or ‘low stakes’ goals will make MS acceptable, while ‘high-stakes’ goals will have the opposite effect.

**Q2 (Lexical)**: What is the influence of the psych status of the embedding verb and the type of embedded wh-phrase? We manipulated psych status (know vs. predict) and wh type (who, where), predicting MS to be less available with predict and with who.

**Q3 (Modal)**: What is the influence of finiteness of the embedded clause? We manipulated (+FIN) status, predicting MS to be available with –FIN, not +FIN clauses.

Our results provide robust experimental evidence for the availability of MS both where it is expected based on these proposed factors licensing MS readings, and where it is unexpected. We argue that an under-specification account along the lines of [6] covers the most ground in meeting these desiderata.

**EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN**

Across experiments with multiple trials each, participants read a scenario, including alternatives, and were asked about the acceptability of an embedded question report, as in (5).
(5) The places that serve cappuccinos around the neighborhood are A, B, C, and D. E, and F do not. Mary usually gets her cappuccino at D. Jane is going to be in the neighborhood tomorrow. She loves cappuccinos, and texts Mary to ask where to get a cappuccino. Mary responds, "D."

Jane reports, "Mary knows where to find cappuccinos." Is Jane right?

There were four within-subject item types, based on the initial answer provided: All False Report (FR) of negative answers, WE+FR, WE/IE-no FR, and MS.

Experiment 1 (n=18) addressed Q1. Contexts presented either ‘low stakes’ (5) or ‘high stakes’ (6) situations. Participants were shown multiple response alternatives (among them EXH, MS, MO), which varied according to information entropy/relevance to goal (manipulated by ranking/frequency).

The Capitol Police have gotten word of a possible terrorist attack targeting specific stores in the area. An independent consultancy firm has calculated the risk of certain stores to be targeted. The firm has not yet released the study, but has ranked the stores from high risk to low risk: Store E is most at risk, with a .5 probability, Store B is next with .4 probability, Store A has a .25 probability, Store D, a .1 probability, Store F, a .05 probability, and Store C is least at risk, with a 0 probability.

The Chief asks his three top advisors, "Where should we set up extra surveillance?" Advisor A says, "Store E." Advisor B says, "Stores, E, B, A, D, and F." Advisor C says, "Stores D and F."

Who knows where to set up extra surveillance? (Choose all that apply.)

Results (see Figure 1) show that MS is more acceptable in low- vs. high-stakes scenarios. In contrast, Exhaustive responses are more acceptable than MS in high-stakes scenarios ($X^2(1) = 6.743, p < .01$), less than MS in low-stakes scenarios ($X^2(1) = 21.561, p < .0001$), and less in low- than in high-stakes situations. High-entropy/relevant alternatives are more acceptable in MS/NO than low-ranked ones. But contra [5], there was no significant difference between MO and MS.

Experiment 2A (n=68) addressed Q2, comparing know to predict. Results show no difference among the two verbs for MS, but unexpected acceptability for WE+FR items for predict, complementing findings reported in [11,12]. See Figure 2.

Experiment 2B (n=68) also addressed Q2, comparing where vs. who embedded questions. Results show slightly higher acceptance of MS for where than who ($X^2(1) = 3.69, p = .055$), and the same difference surprisingly more robust in the WE+FR condition ($X^2(1) = 15.058, p < .0001$).

Experiment 2C (n=68) addressed Q3, comparing ±FIN status of the embedded clause. Results show MS is significantly more available in –FIN than +FIN clauses ($X^2 = 83.642, df=1, p < .0001$), confirming [3,4,5,9,10]. However, MS is not barred in +FIN clauses.

**Figure 1: Experiment 1**

**Figure 2: Experiments 2A-2C**

**DISCUSSION** Our findings clearly demonstrate the dynamic nature of question interpretation: MS is facilitated by the modal semantics of a –FIN clause, but can also be licensed in +FIN clauses by salient contextual goals. We further demonstrate that the relevance of alternatives to discourse goals drives acceptance of an embedded question report ([6,7]): exhaustive responses are preferable to MS in high-stakes scenarios, while MS responses preferable to exhaustive in low-stakes scenarios. Finally, we find that MS is constrained by both lexical and structural factors, but satisfaction of discourse goals may override representations which dis-prefer it. Our findings thus argue in favor of a theoretical approach along the lines of [6,7,8] where embedded clauses can only be specified for their exhaustivity relative to
the contextual goals which determine what counts as resolving the question.