Negated conjunction and question-answer congruence

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Negated conjunction is, by one of De Morgan's laws, truth-conditionally equivalent to a disjunction of negations. In this presentation, I draw on previous and new experimental findings, as well as introspective judgments, to show that negated conjunction nonetheless differs from disjunction in three respects: the ignorance inferences it gives rise to, the questions it can congruently answer, and the way focus constrains the relative scope of negation and conjunction. I argue that these differences are a single phenomenon that can be understood in terms of the questions that a given linguistic form can address. Building on Rooth (1992), I take the meaning of a sentence to be structured so as to carry not only its propositional content but also the question it answers, and I trace the phenomenon to the way such structured meanings compose. To spell this out, I propose a way of combining focus semantics with an alternative semantics for disjunction, together with restrictions on the focus semantic value of a sentence. Finally, I discuss how the approach extends to cases left open by Szabolcsi and Haddican (2004), in which a conjunction and a disjunction that make the same meaning contribution cannot be used in the same context.