

The Syntactic Licensing of Discourse-linked Wh-Phrases

The aim of my dissertation is a cross-linguistically valid syntactic analysis of the phenomenon of *discourse-linking* (d-linking). The prototypical form of d-linked wh-phrases (DWH) is *which N*. Basically, DWH are defined in the literature by way of a “pragmatic” constraint on their usage: The range of felicitous answers to a DWH is limited to a set of objects/entities previously established in the discourse or salient in the context. What makes DWH worth investigating is their peculiar syntactic behavior. In English, the special syntactic properties of DWH are easily demonstrated by their immunity to syntactic superiority. Whereas non-d-linked wh-phrases (NDWH) are subject to it (cf. (1b)), superiority-effects are absent with DWH (cf. (2b)):

- (1) a. *Who_i* did you persuade *t_i* to read *what*?
b. **What_i* did you persuade *who_[m]* to read *t_i*?
(2) a. [*Which man*]_{*i*} did you persuade *t_i* to read [*which book*]?
b. [*Which book*]_{*i*} did you persuade [*which man*] to read *t_i*? (Pesetsky 1987)

This pattern can be observed in all languages in which wh-phrases normally obey superiority. Another special property of DWH found in a wide range of languages is their insensitivity to so called weak islands (illustrated in (3) with a wh-island):

- (3) a. ??*What_i* do you wonder whether Gromit read *t_i*?
b. [*Which of these books*]_{*i*} do you wonder whether Gromit read *t_i*?

Other interesting data come from multiple-wh-fronting languages like Bulgarian. Here DWH can stay in-situ (but can optionally move as (3c) shows), but non-d-linked wh-phrases must all be fronted (cf. (3a)):

- (4) a. *Koj kavko e kupil?*
Who what is bought
Who bought what?
b. *Koj e kupil koja kniga?*
Who is bought which book
Who bought which book?
c. *Koj koja kniga e kupil?* (Bošković 2002)

The ability of DWH to stay in-situ when other wh-phrases cannot can even be demonstrated for languages like English:

- (5) a. *Who fainted when you behaved how?
b. Who fainted when you behaved which way?

These (and other) properties of DWH do not show up in all languages. But this is basically due to the different patterns of question-formation based on the different parametric values in a given language, and not because DWH have different properties in different languages. The main aim of my dissertation then, is to answer the question 'what are the universal properties of DWH and how do language-particular properties affect them'.

None of the analyses provided so far give a unified account of DWH across languages. Either they focus on a rather small range of languages (often only English and some Slavic languages) or they narrow the discussion down to purely syntactic, semantic or pragmatic issues (this is of course a polemical viewpoint). In my opinion, only a thorough investigation into a wide range of different languages and incorporation of all aspects of DWH can lead to a universal analysis. It should be clear that, although the differences between DWH and NDWH are encoded syntactically (as the examples above show), a purely syntactic inquiry has little chance of being successful. Therefore my dissertation will incorporate all the semantic and pragmatic information necessary to achieve my goal, which is twofold. Firstly, it should yield a coherent picture of the universal nature of discourse-linking. Secondly, based on this, the inquiry should lead to a better understanding of the differences of wh-questions across languages.