The Syntax of Adjunct Wh-NPs

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This paper investigates the type of wh-questions studied by Kurafuji (1996) in which the lexical item 'what' is used but is interpreted as a 'why'-question. Kurafuji reports that this construction is attested in Japanese, Russian, and modern Greek (1): as the translations show, 'what'-questions are interpreted as 'why'-questions.

(1) a. John-wa **naze/nani-o** awateteiru no? (Japanese)
John-TOP **why/what-ACC** panicking Q
'Why is John panicking?'

b. **Pochemu/Chto** ty smejoshsja? (Russian)
why/what you laugh
'Why do you laugh?'

Kurafuji also points out that this 'why'-like 'what' (henceforth 'adjunct wh-NP') shares many properties with true adjunct wh-phrases (such as locality effects; see below). We argue that the adjunct wh-NP is an adjunct wh-phrase which occurs within VP. We also show that the properties of the adjunct wh-NP bear crucially on such theoretical issues as the nature of unselective binding, i.e., whether or not unselective binding is available for wh-NPs but not for wh-adverbials (cf. Tsai (1994) and Reinhart (1995)). Based on the island sensitivity of the adjunct wh-NP, we suggest that it is the argument vs. adjunct distinction that is relevant for unselective binding, contrary to Tsai (1994) and Reinhart (1995).

We first report that this construction with the adjunct wh-NP is more wide spread than as reported by Kurafuji (1996): it is attested also in Chinese, German, and some Slavic languages such as Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian.

We then show, based on Chinese data, that the adjunct wh-NP originates as an adjunct within VP. Assuming that verbs in Chinese do not raise out of VP overtly (cf. Huang 1994), the fact that the adjunct *sheme* 'what' follows a verb (2b) indicates that the adjunct *sheme* 'what' occurs within VP.

(2) a. John **weisheme** huang-zhang?
John **why** hurry
'Why is John hurrying?'

b. John huang-zhang **sheme**?
John hurry **what**
'Why is John hurrying?'

Note that the pure adjunct wh *weisheme* 'why' occurs higher than VP, as suggested by the word order in (2a): it occurs preceding the verb. We claim that *weisheme* 'why' is an IP-adjunct while the adjunct *sheme* 'what' is a VP-adjunct, which is corroborated by the asymmetry between the two wh-phrases with respect to inner island effects (cf. Kurafuji 1996 for Japanese).

We also discuss the fact that cross-linguistically, the adjunct wh-NP does not occur in sluicing, unlike other wh-phrases (including 'why'). We seek an explanation for this fact by relating it to the focused nature of adjunct wh-NPs.

Properties of adjunct wh-NPs have some significant theoretical implications, as we will discuss. For instance, the fact that adjunct wh-NPs are subject to all kinds of islands (cf. Kurafuji 1996) argues against Tsai's (1994) and Reinhart's (1995) position that the noun vs. non-noun distinction plays a crucial role for unselective binding. Instead, we will argue for the argument vs. adjunct distinction as the crucial factor for the availability of unselective binding.

Selected references

Kurafuji, T. (1996) "Unambiguous checking," in *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 29, 81-96.

Reinhart, T. (1995) “Interface strategies,” OTS Working Paper, Utrecht University.
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