

Interpretive WH-scoping determines WH-Q agreement on question-embedding predicates

1. It has been a controversial issue whether *wh*-in situ languages such as Korean and Japanese obey the *wh*-island condition. According to Nishigauchi (1990, 1999), Watanabe (1992), Han (1992), and Choe (1995), inter alia, the embedded object *wh nwukwu* ‘who’ in (1) cannot take matrix scope; (1) is only interpreted as the embedded scope reading (1a).

- (1) John-un [Mary-ka **nwukwu-lul** mannass-nunci] mwulesse-co-Ø?
 John-Top [Mary-Nom who-Acc met-Q] asked-Ender-Q?
 a. ‘Did John ask who Mary met t?’ b. *‘Who did John ask whether Mary met t?’

Hwang (2011) as well as Deguchi & Kitagawa (2002), Kitagawa & Fodor (2003), and Kitagawa (2005) claims that the matrix scope reading (1b) is also acceptable when the proper intonation (e.g. F^0 compression between the *wh*-phrase and the matrix complementizer) is assigned.

2. The aforementioned intuition-based approach to the availability of the matrix scope reading in sentences like (1) is worth considering, but the interaction of WH-Q agreement with *wh*-island-internal *wh*’s-in-situ is surely more revealing in resolving this issue. Southeastern Korean representing the Kyengsang dialects is such a language that exhibits WH-Q agreement: A *wh*-phrase agrees with complementizers ‘-no’ (for main verbs) and ‘-ko’ (for copula) as a *wh* question-licensing Q (*wh*Q), while its counterpart non-*wh* indefinite needs ‘-na’ (for main verbs) and ‘-ka’ (for copula) as a polarity question-licensing Q (*p*Q). Corresponding to (1), in Southeastern Korean there are three cases with different types of question-embedding predicates, as follows:

- (2) ni-nun [cheli-ka etey kass-nu-{-nka, -nci}] a{-na, ***no**} // kass-nu-nko] a-na?
 you-Top Cheli-Nom where went-Adn-pQ/pQ know-pQ/*-whQ went-Adn-whQ know-pQ
 ‘(Lit.) Do you know where Cheli went?’
 (3) ni-nun [swuni-ka etey kass-nu-{-nka, -nci}] kwungkumha-{-na > **no**} // kass-nu-nko] **kwungkumha-na**?
 you-Top Swuni-Nom where went-Adn-pQ/pQ wonder-pQ > -whQ went-Adn-whQ wonder-pQ
 ‘(Lit.) Do you wonder where Swuni went?’ or ‘Where do you wonder if Cheli went?’
 (4) swuni-nun [yengi-ka etey kass-nu-**nka** mwul-ess-**no**] // kass-nu-nko] **mwut-te-na**?
 Swuni-Top Yengi-Nom where went-Adn-pQ asked-whQ know-Adn-whQ ask-Retr-pQ
 ‘(Lit.) Did Swuni ask where Yengi went?’ or ‘Where did Swuni ask if Yengi went?’

Suh (2008) notes that in Southeastern Korean *a(l)*- ‘know’-type matrix predicates cannot be followed by the *wh*Q ‘-no’, indicating that the embedded *wh*-element *etey* ‘where’ cannot take the matrix scope. By contrast, both *kwungkumha*- ‘wonder’-type and *mwut*- ‘ask’-type matrix predicates can be followed by the *wh*Q ‘-no’, pointing to the fact that the embedded *wh*-element in (3) and (4) can take the matrix scope, though it preferentially takes the embedded scope.

The same distinction between KNOW and WONDER & ASK-type predicates obtains with the reason *wh*-adverbial *wa* ‘way’ in allowing for the matrix scope.

- (5) ni-nun [cheli-ka wa pyengwon-ey kass-nu-{-nka, -nci}] a{-na, ***no**} // kass-nu-nko] a-na?
 you-Top Cheli-Nom why hospital-to went-Adn-pQ/pQ know-pQ/*-whQ went-Adn-whQ know-pQ
 ‘(Lit.) Do you know why Cheli went to hospital?’
 (6) ni-nun [swuni-ka wa pyengwon-ey kass-nu-{-nka, -nci}] kwungkumha-{-na > **no**} // kass-nu-nko] **kwungkumha-na**?
 you-Top Swuni-Nom why hospital-to went-Adn-pQ/pQ wonder-pQ > -whQ went-Adn-whQ wonder-pQ
 ‘(Lit.) Do you wonder why Swuni went to hospital?’ or ‘Why do you wonder if Cheli went to hospital?’
 (7) swuni-nun [yengi-ka wa pyengwon-ey kass-nu-**nka** mwul-ess-**no**] // kass-nu-nko] **mwut-te-na**?
 Swuni-Top Yengi-Nom why hospital-to went-Adn-pQ asked-whQ know-Adn-whQ ask-Retr-pQ

‘(Lit.) Did Swuni ask why Yengi went to hospital?’ or ‘?Why did Swuni ask if Yengi went to hospital?’

One possible analysis conceivable for the WH-agreement in Southeastern Korean is to employ the syntactic operation of Agree to mandate that the wh-phrase and the Q-particle establishes a WH-Q Agreement relation. One objection to this line of analysis is that when further embedded by the predicate *cip-* ‘want’, *al-* ‘know’-type predicates allow the embedded wh-element to take the otherwise difficult-to-get matrix scope, as in (8):

(8) ni-nun [cheli-ka etey kass-nu{-nka, -nci} al-ko cip{-na = -no}] // kass-nu-nko al-ko cip{-na > -no}?
You-Nom Cheli-Nom where went-Adn-pQ/pQ know-VE want{pQ = whQ} // went-Adn-nQ know-VE want{pQ > whQ}
‘(Lit.) Do you want to know where Cheli went?’ or ‘Where do you want to know if Cheli went?’

3. To account for the wh-island violation or its obviation depending on question-embedding predicates, following Abrusán (2014) we take a semantic approach to this issue. Dayal (1996) argues that a question presupposes that there is a single most informative true proposition in the Karttunen denotation of the question, that is, a proposition that entails all the other true answers to the question. Fox and Hackl (2007) have argued that it is this presupposition -- the Maximal Informativity Principle (MIP) -- that underlies the unacceptability of negative degree islands. Abrusán (2014) extends Fox and Hackl’s analysis to argue that degree questions with wh-islands and a KNOW-type predicate such as ‘*How tall does Mary know whether she should be?’ cannot satisfy this presupposition as well, hence resulting in ungrammaticality. She proved that the semantics of this type of questions does not allow a maximal answer, and thus the statement for any answer that it is the complete answer would amount to a contradiction.

It is to be shown that wh-adverbial *wa* ‘way’ in wh-islands with KNOW-type predicates in (5) cannot receive a maximally informative true answer due to its semantics, which disallows its matrix scope. The reasons that wh-elements in (2) are usually impossible but can improve where the domain of the wh-phrase is individuated or explicitly listed are to be explained along the same line. But wh-islands with WONDER and ASK-type predicates in (3-4) & (6-7) are shown to have a most informative true answer because of their semantics distinct from KNOW-type predicates, especially in very special contexts, which renders them pragmatically odd when uttered out of the blue (Cf. also Uegaki 2015 and Ciardelli & Roelofsen 2015 for more refined semantic analyses of question-embedding predicates). A similar situation is shown to arise with certain cases of modal obviation like (8).

4. The WH-Q agreement in Southeastern Korean shows that its manifestations in matrix clauses with question-embedding predicates cannot be accounted for in syntactic terms, but by semantic considerations. Likewise, wh-island effects or their obviation will find a natural explanation along the line of semantic approach provided here.

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