

Rare and nonexistent interrogative pro-word types: interrogative pro-verbs & Co.

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...question words can “ask about” items belonging to major (or open) syntactic categories, but not minor (or closed) ones.

(Gil 2001)

...it is much more economical to split the questions into an interrogative word ‘who?’ or ‘what?’ + one of the two verbs with a generic meaning, i.e. ‘be’ and ‘do’

(Hagège 2003)

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Constituent questions & presupposition

(2) *Who did John see?*

(3) A constituent question is a question that asks for an instantiation of the variable *x* in an *It is known that (possibly) HAPPEN/EXIST (... x ...)* structure.

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SYNTAX: phrasal categories terminal categories

LEXICON: ~~phrasal categories~~ words

Endocentric vs. exocentric constructions:

Only endocentric constructions can be reduced to their heads, that is to the terminal categories that we are looking for, without being simply elliptical (cf., among others, Hartman & Stork 1972: 76, Crystal 1985: 109).

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...the range of constituents that can be “questioned” is actually quite small and, with one possible exception, is restricted to Noun Phrase and probably to the Determiner constituent of NP.

(Katz & Postal 1964: 98)

(1) Chukchi (Chukotko-Kamchatkan)

req-ørkən-əm igirqej gə-nin ekək?
do.what?-PROG-EMPH right.now 2SG-POSS son.ABS
 ‘What is your son doing right now?’
 (<http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~spena/Chukchee/chapter4.html>)

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Aims:

- Elucidate further the issue of the rarity/ nonexistence of several types of interrogative pro-words against the background of a more general hypothesis on what constitutes a possible interrogative pro-word

General hypothesis

- a statement on the generality of the presupposition going with constituent questions
- a claim on the relevance of the endocentric vs. exocentric distinction

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Endocentric vs. exocentric distinction

- Which elements can be variables that value of the *HAPPEN/EXIST (...)* predicate can depend on?

phrasal level elements

Interrogative pro-phrasal elements:

Interrogative pro-noun phrase
 Interrogative pro-verb phrase
 Interrogative pro-adjective phrase
 Interrogative pro-numeral phrase
 Interrogative pro-adposition phrase
 etc.

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Endocentricity principle:

Interrogative pro-words can be of endocentric phrase creating categories only

Interrogative pro-adverb: (4) *Where do you live?*
Interrogative pro-adjective: (5) *In what town do you live?*
Interrogative pro-noun: (6) *In what do you live?*
 etc.

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Endocentricity principle:
 Interrogative pro-words can be of endocentric phrase creating categories only

(4) *Where do you live?*

~~Interrogative pro-adposition:~~ (7) **WH_{ADPOSITION} the town do you live?*

~~Interrogative pro-auxiliary~~ → **Interrogative pro-relator**

~~Interrogative pro-conjunction~~

etc.

NO COUNTEREXAMPLES REPORTED!

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What about verbs?

centricity dilemma

Verb Phrase

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    graph TD
      VP[Verb Phrase] --> E[endocentric]
      VP --> Ex[exocentric]
      E <--> IV[intransitive verb]
      Ex <--> TV[transitive verb]
    
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What does this tell us about interrogative pro-verbs?

- IPVs are not ruled out completely
- IPVs must be less common than other types of interrogative pro-words
- If an IPV is possible in the language at all, it will first of all be intransitive

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Typically intransitive predicates & endocentricity principle = OK!

Non-verbal predicates → Interrogative pro-“non-verbal predicates”

Nominal predicates → Interrogative pro-nominal predicates
 Adjectival predicates → Interrogative pro-adjectival predicates
 etc.

- mestopredikativy* ‘pro-predicatives’ (Dragunov 1952)

(8) Tuvaluan (Austronesian, Oceanic; Besnier 2000: 425)
Ne aa taulua olooga ki motu?
 NPST what your go:NMLZ to islet
 ‘How did your trip to the islets go?’ (lit.: ‘What (was) your going to the islets’)

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- Interrogative pro-“non-verbal predicates” are often called “interrogative verbs” in grammars

(predicative) interrogative pro-predicates

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    graph TD
      IP[interrogative pro-“non-verbal predicates”]
      IPV[interrogative pro-verbs proper]
      IP --> IPV
    
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- Interrogative pro-“non-verbal predicates” are much more frequent than interrogative pro-verbs proper
- BUT much depends on the analysis!

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- Languages where all interrogative pro-words function as predicates

...wh-questions in Salish generally take the form of clefts ... in which the wh-word evidently is not in a complementizerlike position, but rather is the predicate of the higher clause of a biclausal construction. (Kroeber 1999:247)

(9) Thompson (Salishan; Kroeber 1999:263)
swét k=wik-t-xw
 who ART=see-TR-2SG.TR.SBJ
 ‘Who did you see?’

non-verbal predicative interrogative pro-non-predicates

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predicative interrogative pro-predicates

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    graph TD
      PIP[predicative interrogative pro-predicates] --> IPN[interrogative pro-“non-verbal predicates”]
      PIP --> IPV[interrogative pro-verbs proper]
      IPN <--> NPN[non-verbal predicative interrogative pro-non-predicates]
      IPV <--> VNP[verbal interrogative pro-non-predicates]
      NPN --> PIPN[predicative interrogative pro-non-predicates]
      VNP --> PIPN
    
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- ‘say what?, say how?’

(10) Kolyma Yukaghir (Yukaghir; Maslova 1999:480)
qu, monohot-ček
 wow say.what-Q.2SG
 ‘Wow, what have you said?’

- ‘go where?’
 Aneityum (Austronesian, Oceanic; Lynch 2000:78): *hanid?*
- ‘do how?’
 Sie (Austronesian, Oceanic; Crowley 1998:238): *ovsoc?*
- etc.

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verbal interrogative pro-non-predicates ↔ **do not question the event itself**

interrogative pro-verbs proper ↔ **question the event itself**

‘do what?’, ‘do what to [smb/smith]?’.
 ‘what happen?’, ‘what happen to [smb/smith]?’

(11) Kayardild (Tangkic; Evans 1995:371)
nyingka ngaaka-wath?
 2SG.NOM what-INCHOATIVE
 ‘What are you doing?’

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Does an interrogative pro-verb provide the most uncontradictory solution to the centrality dilemma?

NO

- Due to the endocentricity principle, if an IPV is possible in the language at all, it will first of all be intransitive
- A construal that categorizes as *endocentric* phrase creating is expanded to stand for *exocentric* phrases of *one and the same* category



- It categorizes as both endocentric *and* exocentric phrase creating at the same time

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What could be a better solution?

- Use an interrogative pro-word of another category, e.g. 'what?', 'how?' (cf. *where?* both for AdvP & AdpP)
- Create a VP with it by means of a general non-interrogative verb, like 'do', 'happen'



division of labour

- + 'what?': (12) a. – *What did he do?*
b. – *He swam/ He killed a bird.*
- + 'how?': (13) Tohono O'odham (Uto-Aztecan; Madeleine Mathiot, p.c.)
s'aa-m ʔe-vua?
how-2PL are-doing
'What are you doing?'

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Cross-linguistic frequency:

'do' + 'what?, how?'

interrogative pro-verb

90%

10%

NB: A language can have both strategies

- (14) Kuot (East Papuan; Lindström 2002:13-14, 216)
- a. *-amani* 'do what?'
- b. *Mani lə u-me a-kosar...?*
what REL 3M.SBJ-HAB 3M.OBJ-make=Ø
'What does [that brother of yours] do...?' (B: 'He just fools around.')

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What about transitive interrogative pro-verbs?

- Possible only when an intransitive IPV is present
 - Regular transitivizing mechanisms must be available
- (15) Paamese (Austronesian, Oceanic; Crowley 1982: 159)
- a. *raise gosaa?*
rice do.what:3SG:REALIS
'How is it going with the rice?' (lit: 'What is the rice doing?')
- b. *ko-gosein tuu-mali?*
2SG-do.what.to:REALIS brother-2SG.M
'What have you done to your brother?'

only intransitive IPV

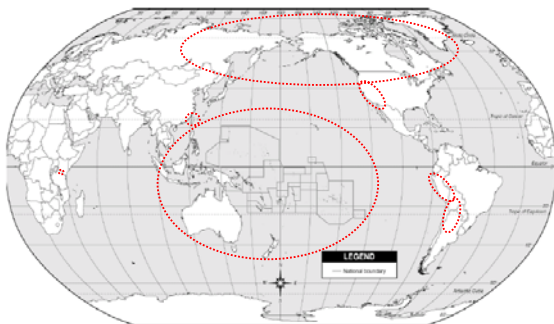
intransitive & transitive IPVs

75%

25%

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Areal distribution of IPVs



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Correlations

- A good deal of head-marking
- A good deal of "verby" features:
 - extensive use of verbalization (rather than nominalization)
 - widespread incorporation
 - often other kinds of predicative interrogatives are present as well
- Genetic (& areal) predisposition

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Common sources of IPVs

IPVs often have a rather transparent etymology

- Compounding (incorporation) 'do' + 'what?, how?' (e.g., Aymara)
- Conversion (verbalization) of 'what?' (e.g., many Australian languages)
- Semantic change/ polysemy: 'be how?, do how?' → 'do what?' (e.g., Hadza, Watjarri)
- Semantic change: 'do' → 'do something?, do what?' (?Salish languages)

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