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

Dmitry Idiatov
Center for Grammar, Cognition and Typology
Dmitry.Idiatov@ua.ac.be

...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-ərkən-əmi g i r q e j 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)

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

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.

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.

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.

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

(4) Where do you live?

Interrogative pro-adposition: (7) *WH*

Interrogative pro-auxiliary

Interrogative pro-conjunction

Interrogative pro-relation

eq

NO COUNTEREXAMPLES REPORTED!

Typically intransitive predicates & endocentric principle = OK!

Non-verbal predicates

Interrogative pro-“non-verbal predicates”

Nominal predicates

Adjectival predicates

etc.

metapredicativity “pro-predicatives” (Dragunov 1952)

(8) Tuvaluan (Austronesian, Oceanic; Bennier 2000: 425)

Ne au adau olouga ki mete?

‘How did your trip to the islets go?’ (lit.: ‘What (was) your going to the islets?’)

Typically intransitive predicates

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 1999:265)

swét k=wík-t-xw

‘Who did you see?’

‘say what?, say how?’

(10) Kolyma Yukaghir (Yukaghir; Maslova 1999:480)

qu. monokiri:gu

‘Wow, what have you said?’

‘go where?’

Aneityum (Austronesian, Oceanic; Lynch 2000:78): hamid

‘What happen?’

‘do how?’

Sie (Austronesian, Oceanic; Crowley 1998:238); avsoc

‘do what?’, ‘do what to [s/mb/smt]?’

‘what happen?’, ‘what happen to [s/mb/smt]?’

(11) Kayardild (Tangkic; Evans 1995:371)

nyíngka ngaaka-wath?

‘What are you doing?’

Idiatov, Rara & Rarissima 2006
Does an interrogative pro-verb provide the most uncontradictory solution to the centrivity dilemma?

NO

- Due to the endocentric 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

Cross-linguistic frequency:

'do' + 'what?, how?'

interrogative pro-verb

90% 10%

NB: A language can have both strategies

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?':
  a. - What did he do?
  b. - He swam/ He killed a bird.

+ 'how?':
  (12) a. - What did he do?
  b. - He swam/ He killed a bird.

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?'

Areal distribution of IPVs

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?' \(\rightarrow\) 'do what?' (e.g., Hadza, Watjarri)
- Semantic change: 'do' \(\rightarrow\) 'do something?, do what?' ("Salish languages")