

Week 10: Lecture 1 and 2
Wh-movement and Summary

1. Introduction: some things we already know about questions
Yes/ No questions

→ Recall ‘yes’/ ‘no’ questions such as (1)

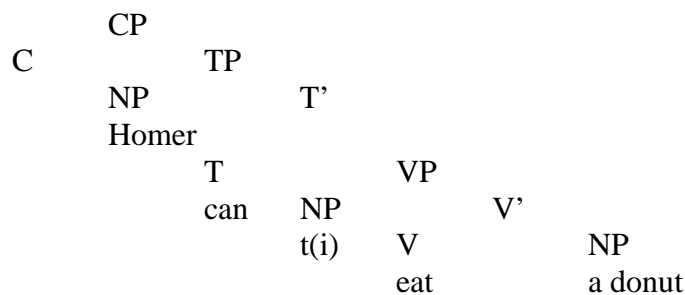
- (1) a. Did Homer eat a donut?
- b. Can Homer eat a donut?
- c. Should Homer eat a donut?
- d. Will Homer eat a donut?

→ what are the reasons for do-support?

→ why is it not possible to have (2) and (3)

- (2) Homer ate a donut?
- (3) Ate Homer a donut?
- (3’) Is Homer eating a donut?

Let’s refine the structure to accommodate subject-aux. inversion and do-support



We will assume now that the subject starts out in spec of VP, where it gets its Agent semantic role. Then, the Agent moves to spec TP, while the AUX ‘can’ moves to C

When there is no Aux, a dummy ‘do’ is inserted.

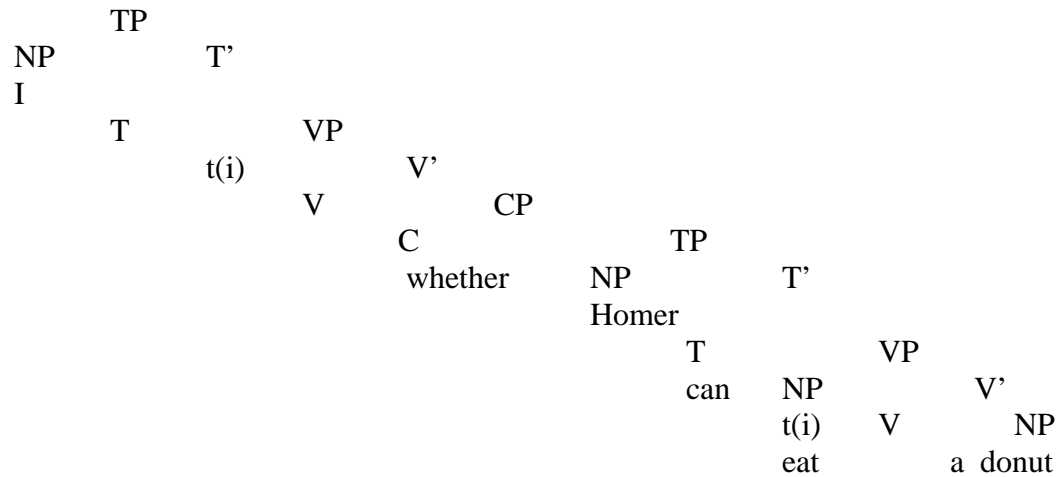
→ Why? Are there languages where the equivalent of (3) is ok? what explains the difference between English and the languages that allow something like (3)?

→ Now, look at embedded clauses:

(4') I wonder whether Homer can eat a donut

(5') * I wonder whether can homer eat a donut

→ There is no inversion



→ Does 'do' support take place in embedded questions? Why not?

→ Now let's look at wh-questions:

(4) What did Homer eat?

→ We see do-support and the movement of the object to spec CP

2. On wh-movement and some of its nitty-gritty

--> What drives the movement of the wh to spec CP?

→ Why can't we say:

(5) *Did Homer eat what?

→ We can say, though with a difference in meaning, (6)

(6) Homer ate what?

What is the difference in meaning between (4) and (6)?

→ In some languages "John saw what?" is the only way to ask a question, by the way

--> tree for (6) / (4)

3. Subject / object asymmetries in wh-questions

→ consider (7). Why is there no inversion?

(7) Who ate the donut?

(8) What did Homer eat?

(9) *Who did eat the donut?

(10)*What Homer ate?

→ this is an interesting puzzle about English which you hopefully will learn more about in Syntax 322

4. Long distance wh, wh-in situ, and multiple wh-fronting

(11)What does Lisa think Homer ate?

(12)Who thinks that Homer ate a donut?

→ what do the above sentences show us regarding the locality of Wh-movement? is it clause-bounded?

→ Another important thing about Wh-movement is that Wh-words can remain in situ in non-echo questions.

(13)a. Who saw what?

b. Who saw what where?

→ these are the so-called pair-list readings (not to be confused with echo-questions)

→ what allows the lower wh –element to remain in-situ?

→ but notice: why don't we say:

(14) a. *who what saw?

b. *Who what saw where?

→ In some languages, both wh-elements must be fronted, though (at least in Russian) the fronting both wh-words is not required:

(15) a. Kto chto videl?
who what saw?
who saw what

b. Kto videl chto?
who saw what

→ at first blush, there does not seem to be any semantic difference between them. What can allow such optionality in Russian, but not in English?

→ **superiority** = the inability to move the lower wh- element (the object) over the subject and then move the subject (16)

(16)a.* what who saw?

b.* what(i) did who see t(i)?

→ what motivates it? how can we explain these effects?

→ Successive cyclicity = move lower stuff first then stuff that's higher/

→ extension means that you can only build the tree higher. you cannot move things underneath other moved/merged things

→ Interestingly, even in those languages that have multiple wh-fronting still respect superiority, though the contrast in Russian is weaker than it is in English:

(17) ? Chto kto videl?
what who saw

→ Importantly, the 'pair'-list reading completely disappears in (14) . If anything, this sentence can only mean 'what specific thing' did someone see

(18) TREE for 'what who saw'