Determining when, how, and why: multiple wh-questions and sluicing

The dominant approach to sluicing pioneered in Ross (1967) and Merchant (2001) is that the syntax underlying a sluice is that of a regular wh-question.

(1) Sandy interviewed someone, but we don't know who.

In this vein, Van Craenenbroeck and Lipták (VC&L) (2013) develop an approach to sluicing crosslinguistically, claiming that whether a language exhibits genuine sluicing, and what types of remnants are available, should be predictable from the syntax of wh-questions in non-elliptical contexts.

In this paper I argue that by examining sluicing in lesser-studied languages, we can show that VC&L's formulation of the correspondence between elliptical and non-elliptical contexts is too simple. Instead, I suggest (following Grbanova and Manetta, forthcoming) that this correspondence must take a more holistic view of a language's system of forming unbounded dependencies.

Of particular interest here is VC&L's extension of their generalization to multiple wh-fronting languages (MWFLs). They assert that only in MWFLs in which non-intial wh-phrases undergo focus movement (not wh-movement to Spec, CP), should sluicing be permitted with non-wh remnants.

The Indic language Kashmiri is an MWFL, and exhibits sluicing with non-wh remnants.

(2) kəm-is   kəm'   k'aa   d'ut.
    Who-DAT who-ERG what give.PST.MSG
    'Who gave what to whom?'

(3) Ra:jI rani   ka:Nh. Me   chu   basaan   naan.
    Raj cook.FUT something 1SG.NOM AUX.1SG think.PRP naan.
    'Raj cooked something. I think naan.'

Yet unlike the better-studied Slavic languages VC&L examine, Kashmiri is verb-second (V2); we can show that non-initial wh-phrases must move to Spec, CP. The interaction between V2 and wh-fronting reveals that Kashmiri represents a counterexample to VC&L's generalization.

In revising this generalization, I propose to take a more fine-grained approach to the relation between sluicing and typical wh-questions. This result does not preclude systematic correspondence between elliptical and non-elliptical structures; this paper seeks to investigate the more nuanced shape this correspondence must take.

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