

## Interrogative slifting in English

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes English “*wh*-slifting” sentences (for example, *How old is she do you think*). We argue that these sentences are not scope-marking constructions nor are they derived by simple clausal pied-piping as an alternative to *wh*-extraction. We show that such sentences are akin to declarative slifting sentences, but more restricted than the latter particularly in the kinds of evidential predicates they co-occur with. We argue that the slifted question is not first merged as the complement of the main clause, but that the relationship between the two clauses is mediated by an evidential morpheme, which takes the *do you think*-clause as its specifier. This analysis, which explains several properties of *wh*-slifting that distinguish it from scope-marking constructions and Basque-type clausal pied-piping, partially reconciles *wh*-slifting questions with paratactic approaches to quotative constructions.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper presents an analysis of sentences like (1) and (2), discussed parenthetically in several sources, but not analysed extensively in any published work as far as we are aware (Ross, 1973; Kayne, 1998; Lahiri, 2002; Reis, 2002; Horvath, 2006). We refer to such sentences as *wh*-slifting constructions in the spirit of Ross (1973).

(1) How old is she, did she say?

(2) Where did John go, do you think?

The main goal of this paper is to argue that sentences such as (1) and (2) are not covert scope marking (partial *wh*-movement) constructions (pace Horvath, 1998; Kayne, 1998; Lahiri, 2002), nor instances of embedded clause pied-piping (Ross, 1973). We argue instead that such questions are a species of interrogative slifting constructions, whose membership also includes slifting of *yes/no* questions as in (3). We show that questions like those in (1)–(3) are akin to declarative slifting sentences, as in (4), but more restricted than the latter particularly in the kinds of evidential predicates that they occur with.

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(3) Is Raul coming, do you think?

(4) Max is a Martian, I believe.

(Ross, 1973:131)

We argue, contra Ross (1973), that the slifted clause—the question on the left in (1)–(3)—is not first merged as the complement of the main clause, but that the main clause is merged in the specifier position of an evidential head whose complement is the slifted interrogative. Adapting Collins and Branigan's (1997) and Suñer's (2007) analyses of direct quotation structures, we propose that the slifted clause is co-indexed with a null operator in the main clause. Different word order possibilities for interrogative slifting constructions—that is, slifting of the entire clause or only a portion thereof—are argued to reflect movement of slifted clause material to a focus position above the evidential phrase. This proposal, which partially reconciles questions like (1)–(3) with quotative constructions, accounts for several word order, binding and presuppositional properties of interrogative slifting constructions that distinguish them from scope marking constructions, Basque-type clausal pied-piping constructions as well as declarative slifting sentences.

The discussion is organised as follows. Section 2 considers the viability of two other approaches to questions like (1) and (2) suggested in the literature—complement clause pied-piping, and indirect dependency scope-marking analyses—and argues that neither approach provides an empirically adequate description of the English constructions in (1) and (2). Section 3 compares questions like (1)–(3) to declarative slifting constructions. Section 4 develops a syntactic analysis of interrogative slifting constructions. Section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2. Scope marking and clausal pied-piping approaches

In this section, we consider and ultimately reject two possible analyses of sentences such as (1) and (2) that have been proposed for similar phenomena cross-linguistically. One possibility that we consider is that sentences such as (1) and (2) are cases of finite clause pied-piping of the Basque type as analysed by Ortiz de Urbina (1989, 1993) and Arregi (2003) (see also Echeperae, 1997). The possibility of such an analysis for questions like (1) and (2) is raised but not considered in detail by Horvath (2006). In Basque, the pied-piped clause appears in the same left-peripheral position—left adjacent to the main verb—which non-pied-piping *wh*-phrases also occupy. Examples of clausal pied-piping and long *wh*-movement in Basque are provided in (5) and (6), respectively.<sup>1</sup>

(5) [Se idatzi rabela Jon-ek ] pentzate su?  
[what written has Jon-erg ] you-think  
'What do you think Jon wrote?'

(Clausal pied-piping: Arregi, 2003)

(6) Se, pentzate su [ t<sub>i</sub> idatzi rabela Jon-ek ]?  
what you-think [ written has Jon-erg ]  
'What do you think Jon wrote?'

(Long *wh*-movement: Arregi, 2003)

Ortiz de Urbina (1989, 1993) and Arregi (2003) argue that clausal pied-piping is derived from the same underlying structure that feeds long *wh*-movement and that the two constructions have the same LFs. Ortiz de Urbina (1993) proposes that the difference between the two structures is feature percolation, that is, that in clausal pied-piping contexts, the relevant *wh*-feature raises out of the *wh*-phrase to a dominating node—CP—with the consequence that the whole CP raises. Below we present evidence against a similar kind of approach to the relationship between *wh*-slifting sentences and long *wh*-movement sentences in English. A second possibility proposed by Kayne (1998:174, n.107) and Lahiri (2002) is that sentences such as (1) and (2) are akin to scope marking constructions, which have been discussed in a considerable body of literature on languages including German, Hindi, Hungarian, Passamaquoddy, Romani, and Warlpiri (Herburger, 1994; Beck, 1996; Lahiri, 2002; Dayal, 2000; McDaniel, 1989; Horvath, 1997, 2000; Bruening, 2004; Legate, 2011). In such constructions, the scope of a *wh*-word originating in an embedded clause seems to correspond to the surface position of a second *wh*-phrase in the higher clause—*kyaa* in the Hindi example in (7) and *was* in the German example in (8).

(7) Raam kyaa soctaa hai [ ki Ramaa-ne kisko dekha ].  
Raam what thinks [ that Ramaa-ERG who saw ]  
'Who does Raam think that Ramaa saw?'

(Hindi: Dayal, 2000)

<sup>1</sup> Arregi's data are from the Ondarroa dialect of Basque (see Arregi, 2003, n. 1)

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