An Argument/Adjunct Asymmetry in Wh-questions:
a novel argument for LF

A famous and important set of puzzles in the word order of many languages are known as ‘intervention
effects’; there has been heated debate between syntactic (Beck 1996, Beck & Kim 1997, Hagstrom 1998)
and semantic (Honcoop 1998, Beck 2006) accounts. As defined in (1), the problem is that, in certain
languages, wh-phrases cannot be interpreted in situ under the scope of negation. According to Beck
(1996), questions with the relevant elements in languages like German, Korean, and Japanese require a
word order permutation which is otherwise optional: one in which the otherwise in-situ object question
word is overtly scrambled to a position structurally superior to the negation. The discovery of intervention
effects has stimulated a large amount of research which has crucially relied on syntactic constraints on
Logical Form to account for them. In recent work, however, Beck (2006) herself has argued that the
intervention effects follow from ‘pure’ semantic considerations, and do not require such structural
constraints stated over LFs.

(1) Intervention Effects (IE)
In LF, a wh-phrase may not move across certain Scope-Bearing Interveners (e.g. NPI, not, only, even)

However, this paper presents a new set of facts which has the potential to reorient the debate on
intervention effects. I have found in a series of experiments using magnitude estimation tasks (Fig 1)
(Bard, Robertson and Sorace 1996) that only ‘argument’ wh-phrases trigger intervention effects in (2),
and that ‘adjunct’ wh-phrases do not in (3) and (4) (a conclusion confirmed by differential pitch and
timing effects in pronunciation as well; Fig. 2,3). This novel fact is extremely surprising given much
earlier work on the nature of argument vs. adjunct asymmetries: in fact, it is almost diametrically the
relativized minimality effects (Rizzi 1992), they posit that wh-phrases that range over individuals (wh-
arguments) are good extractors out of all weak islands (can scope over any intervener). However, the
present paper provides a counter-argument that it is the adjuncts that are insensitive to the interveners,
calling into question a pure semantic account along familiar lines.

Figure 1. Strength of preference for acceptability and grammaticality with Intervention data Korean
wh-questions (Also, three way ANOVA supports a significant effect of wh-phrases on evaluation
scores and negligibility of linguist vs. non-linguist group variation)

(2) *Wen hat niemand wo gesehen?
   whom has nobody where seen
   ‘Where did nobody see whom?’ (Beck 2006) [German]
In this respect, this asymmetry provides crucial evidence for a proposal along the lines of Beck (1996), which provides an argument for the necessity of LF (over a purely ‘semantic’ account à la Beck 2006). Based on the categorical (nominal vs. adverb) dichotomy evidenced by structural case attachment tests in (5) and formation of complex wh-expressions in (6), I suggest different base locations for wh-arguments (inside NegP) and wh-adjuncts (outside NegP) in these languages. Accordingly, insensitivity of wh-adjuncts to Intervention Effects is naturally predicted by their inherently higher positions at LF. Consequently, Beck & Kim’s (1997) generalization on Intervention Effects in (7) needs to be revised as in (8).

(5) ACC-marker attachability test: Korean / Japanese wh-phrases
mues-lul / nani-o ‘what-acc’
nuku-lul / dare-o ‘who-acc’
eti-lul / doko-o ‘where-acc’

* etteke-lul / * doo-o ‘* how-acc’
* encey-lul / * itu-o ‘* when-acc’

* way-lul / * naze-o ‘* why-acc’

(6) Formation of complex wh-expressions in Korean
enu {nuku / mues / *et / *encey / *etteke / *elma / *way}
which who / what / where / when / how /how:much / why

(Chung 2000)

(7) *[... [NPI [...wh-phrase...]]...Q]]

(8) *[... [Neg [...wh-phrase...]]...Q]]

SELECTED REFERENCES