# More on the indefinite-interrogative affinity:The view from embedded non-finite interrogatives

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- **Goal**: relate the presence(e.g. English) vs. absence(e.g. German) of embedded non-finite interrogatives to the indefinite-interrogative affinity.[1]

- **Main Conclusion**: if a language possesses **embedded non-finite (wh-)interrogatives** (as in (1)), then the pronominal system of that language does not possess any robust indefinite/interrogative ambiguity.

  (1)    Mary suddenly remembered [*where* to find the keys].                    English
         → Wh-words canNOT be used as indefinites.

  (2)    *Maria erinnerte sich plötzlich [*wo* die Schlüssel (zu) finden].                    German
         → Wh-words can be used as indefinites.

## 1  Starting point: Sabel (2006)

- **Generalization**: languages who allow WH-movement to Spec-CP in infinitival constructions, have the option of filling the infinitval C-system with a base generated overt element. E.g. English:

  (3)    They would prefer [CP for [IP Mary to put the keys in the safe]]

  → No counterpart available in German.

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[1]**Abbreviations used throughout the handout:**

- [+**enfi**] = language with embedded infinitival interrogatives (see (1)).
- [+**obs**] = language with overtly base generated infinitival complementizers(see (3)).
- [**i=i**] = language with Interrogatively/Indefinite ambiguity.

- **Typology proposed by Sabel:**

    - **Group 1** = [+enfi, +obs]: e.g. English, French, Italian, Polish, (European) Portuguese, Spanish, Basque, Modern Hebrew (Last two added by Gartner)

    - **Group 2** = [-enfi, -obs]: e.g. Danish, German, Norwegian, Swedish

    ⇒ **Other combinations are not attested**.

## 2 Gartner (2009): if [+enfi] → no interrogative/indefinite ambiguity

- **Initial observation by Gartner:** Word strings involving Wh-interrogatives and to-infinitivals are acceptable in German <u>when the interpretation of the WH-word is not interrogative</u> (but instead used as an indefinite):

    (4)     Ich habe vor, *was* zu tun.                                                    German
            I intend to do something.

- **Main observation:** No language in **Group 1** allows an interpretation as in (4), because they have strict different lexical entries for interrogative and indefinite pronouns (e.g. English: *Who vs. Someone*, Italian: *chi vs. qualcuno*). In other words, (5-a) is never interpreted as in (5-b).

    (5)     a.     Mary suddenly remembered [*where* to find the keys].

            b.     Mary suddenly remembered *some place* to find the keys.

- **Gartner's hypothesis:** Languages that possess embedded non-finite (wh-)interrogatives do not possess any indefinite/interrogative ambiguity.

    - **Group 1**: [+enfi] [i=i] Not attested
    - **Group 2**: [+enfi] [i≠i] Basque, English, French, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Polish, (European) Portuguese, Spanish.
    - **Group 3**: [-enfi] [i=i] German
    - **Group 4**: [-enfi] [i≠i] Danish, Norwegian, Swedish.

    ⇒ **Main part of Paper:** Reporting more languages that confirm Gartner's hypothesis.

## 3 The Issue of Non-Robustness

- Gartner classifies the interrogative/indefinite ambiguity even further. Namely, languages can be [i=i] in a *robust* or *non-robust* way.

- **Three ways of Non-Robustness:**

  1. **Not all WH-words can also be used as indefinites.**

     Dutch *wat* (=who) can be used as an indefinite ((6-a)), but it also allows overtly base generated infinitival complementizers ((6-b)). BUT Dutch does ONLY have WH-indefinites for persons. Hence, ((6-c)) is not possible.

     (6)    Dutch (Indo-European)
          a.    Ik weet  niet [wie te bezoeken]
              I  know not  who to visit
              'I don't know who to visit.' (Sabel (1996): 295)
          b.    dat  zij  probeerde [CP  om [IP  het boek te lezen]]
              that she tried      comp the book to  read
              'that she tried to read the book' (Sabel 1996: 294)
          c.    Ik heb  *waar/ergens      gelezen, dat  de  zomer    mooi wordt.
              I  have *where/somewhere read,    that the summer nice  be-FUT.
              'I read somewhere that summer is going to be nice.'
              (Added by Liz)

  2. **Bare interrogatives can only be used in specific environments.**

     For example in Latin, a [+enfi] language, bare interrogatives can be used when they are enclitic upon an element (e.g. in an *if*-construction as in (7-a)).

     (7)    a.    Si quid  petieritis        me in nomine meo, hoc
              if  what ask.sbjv.fut.2sg me in name    my    that faciam do.sbjv.1sg
              'If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.' (Haspelmath (1997): 255)
          b.    Licet    mihi   loqui  *quid / ali-quid    ad te?
              allowed me.dat say.inf what  / some-what to  you
              'May I say something to you?' (Haspelmath (1997): 254)

     Another case is Newari: non-interrogatively used bare wh-pronouns are reported to be confined to the scope of negation, meaning *nobody* and *nothing* only (Haspelmath 1997: 170)

  3. **Bare Interrogatives can only have a non-specific reading**
     (e.g. In Russian, Lithuanian, Slovene, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Gothic, Latin, Polish). This seems to hold for almost all Western Indo-European Languages, except German (see (9)).

     (8)    Skal    us     hwa  qian. Gothic (Indo-European)
              I.must to.you what say
              'I must tell you something.' (Haspelmath 1997: 173)

     (9)    Gestern   hat mich wer angerufen, den  kenne ich noch aus   der
              yesterday has me    who called      dem know I    still  from the

Schule.German (Indo-European)
school
'Yesterday, someone called me who I know from school.'

**Side Note**: How is the use of the Bare Indefinite in the Slovene example in (10) non-specific?:

(10)    Odlocil sem se  [kje    zgraditihi o]
        decided aux refl where build.inf   house
        'I decided where to build a house.'

- **New classification of [i=i]:**

    1. Languages with a Robust Interrogative/Indefinite Ambiguity = [+i=i]
    2. Languages with a Non-Robust Interrogative/Indefinite Ambiguity = [%i=i]
    3. Languages with NO Interrogative/Indefinite Ambiguity = [-i=i]

- **More specific typology:**

    - **Group 1**: [+enfi, +i=i]: $\emptyset$
    - **Group 2**: [+enfi, %i=i]:Dutch, (Reichenau German), (Latin), Lithuanian, Russian, Slovene
    - **Group 3**: [+enfi, -i=i]:Basque, English, French, Pennsylvania German, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Polish, (European) Portuguese, Spanish
    - **Group 4**: [-enfi, +i=i]:German
    - **Group 5**: [-enfi, %i=i]:(Latin)
    - **Group 6**: [-enfi, -i=i]:Danish, Norwegian, Swedish

- **Revised Generalization**: Languages with embedded infinitival Interrogatives cannot also have a Robust Interrogative/Indefinite Ambiguity. ([+enfi] $\rightarrow \neg$[+i=i])

# 4  Crosslinguistics Survey

- **Gartner's approach:** prove that languages with a robust interrogative/indefinite ambiguity do not possess ENFI's. He does this by investigating the respective inventories of non-finite forms that could plausibly underlie ENFI's.

    - Uses other papers and trusts labels glossed as *infinitives, converbs* and *action nominals* as his prime candidates for non-finite sources of ENFIs.
    - Embedded interrogatives are often arguments of predicates like *wonder, know,* and *tell.*
    - A necessary condition for possession of (counterparts of) infinitives requires a language to be **m-asymmetric** according to the following definition (based on Bisang (2001:1404-1408):
    *If a language L has clause types with obligatory marking of relevant features in the extended projection of the verb, then*

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1. *L is m(inus)-asymmetric if that marking disappears in dependent clauses, and*
2. *L is p(lus)-asymmetric if that marking disappears in independent clauses.*

⇒ This definition concerns ALL types of functional marking!

- **Example of Gartner's approach/reasoning:** Gothic seems to be a good candidate for an ENFI. BUT! Although a sentence translatable as 'I know what to do', is shown to appear with *taujau*, a finite version of do bearing optative mood: *andahta mik [hva taujau]*. Therefore we have to classify Gothic as a [?enfi, +i=i]-language, like German.

  - This approach naturally excludes languages lacking ENFIs "trivially", i.e., because they are not m-asymmettric (at all or in the relevant clausal domain)
  - Excludes languages that are neutral w.r.t. the finite/non-finite distinction (i.e., Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong).
  - Excludes languages WITHOUT infinitives, converts and action nominals can impossibily be [+ENFI].

## 5  Relating the ENFI-gap to the indefinite-interrogative affinity

⇒ **Focus on German**

- **General Principle:** Avoid Ambiguities: ENFIs is blocked in languages where these structures would be "hard to recognize".

- **Strategies** languages might have for turning declaratives containing indefinite pronouns into interrogatives.

  1. Having separate pronouns for indefinites and wh-words.
  2. Putting them in different positions (e.g. in-situ indefinites vs. WH-movement when interpreted as an interrogative.)
  3. Difference in intonation
     Chinese (Sino-Tibetan)

     (11)    a.    Zheli que-le    shenme
                   here  miss-asp something
                   'Something is missing here.' (Bhat 2000: 379)
             b.    Zheli que-le shenme?
                   'What is missing here?' (Bhat 2000: 379)

- The fronting strategy, i.e., strategy 2, is not reliable when it comes to the attempt of forming ENFIs, given the fact that German is an OV-language with scrambling. Namely, (Specific) wh-indefinites will easily end up on the left edge of an infinitival constituent independently, as shown in (12)

(12)    Ich habe vor, was   zu tun.
        I    have for, what to do
        'I intend to do something.'

Gartner argues that in the case of German, ENFIs would be hard to recognize as interrogatives
due to

1. The lack of unambiguous clausal typing (because of the indefinite/interrogative ambiguity).

2. The lack of unambiguous identification as interrogatives in terms of interpretational properties:

   (a) The semantics of predicates selecting both infinitivals and interrogatives: verbs who allow both infinitival and interrogative complements are *ergessen* (?forget?), *entscheiden* ('decide'), *erklären* ('state'), *lernen* ('learn'), *mitteilen* ('inform'), *(sich) berlegen* ('ponder'). None of these verbs denote default acts of seeking information. Thus their complements would not easily be recognizable as interrogatives from interpretation alone.

   (b) The peculiar illocutionary force potential of infinitival interrogatives when used as independent clauses: both infinitival interrogatives and indefinites are not to be interpreted as request by the speaker to get some information from the addressee.

(13)    a.  An wen soll   ich mich wenden?
            at  who shall I    me   turn.inf
            ?Who should I talk to??
        b. #An wen sich    wenden?
            at  who oneself turn.inf

Non-V2-interrogatives in root position only function as 'uncertainty' questions, with the uncertainty implying a deliberative attitude toward the question raised, and thus inducing self-directedness? (Reis (2003): 191).

# 6   To be aware of when studying other languages:

- Can all WH-words be used as indefinites?

- Does the language allow embedded infinitival interrogatives?

- Requirements? Specificity, Negation, Conditional constructions

- ......

# References

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