

## Multiple reasons to lack multiple *wh*-questions

It has been claimed that in certain languages (e.g. Italian, Irish, and Somali), it is impossible to form questions that include more than one *wh*-constituent. This is surprising because under prominent semantic analyses of questions (e.g. Hamblin question semantics, Karttunen proto-questions), single and multiple *wh*-questions are derived through similar mechanisms (Dayal, 2016; Kotek, 2019). I argue that languages cannot in fact “turn off” the availability of multiple *wh*-questions as a parametric choice. Instead, focusing on Jakarta Indonesian (JI) as a case study, I will show that (i) the impossibility of multiple *wh*-questions is construction-specific rather than a language-wide pattern, and (ii) we can derive the impossibility of multiple *wh*-questions from independent constraints on question formation. JI data reported come from original fieldwork.

- (1) Mia udah (nge)-beli buku=nya.  
Mia PERF SV-buy book=DET  
'Mia has bought the book.'
- (2) Buku=nya udah Mia (\*nge)-beli.  
book=DET PERF Mia OV-buy  
'Mia has bought the book.'
- (3) Buku=nya di-beli (ama Mia).  
book=DET PASS-buy with Mia  
'The book was bought (by Mia).'
- (4) Siapa yang *t* udah (nge)-beli buku?  
who REL PERF SV-buy book  
'Who has bought the book?'
- (5) Apa yang *t* udah Mia (\*nge)-beli?  
what REL PERF Mia OV-buy  
'What has Mia bought?'
- (6) Apa yang *t* di-beli (ama Mia)?  
what REL PASS-buy with Mia  
'What was bought (by Mia)?'

**Background.** JI has an Austronesian-type voice system: Subject Voice (1), Object Voice (2) and an Indo-European-style passive voice (aka *di*-passive; (3)). In every clause, there is a designated pivot, and the pivot argument is sentence-initial across all three voices.

**Single *wh*-questions.** Nominal *wh*-questions are expressed by one of two possible strategies: the *yang* strategy or the *yang*-less strategy. In the *yang*-strategy, *wh*-phrases are separated from the rest of the question by the relativiser *yang*. The *yang*-strategy is subject to the “pivot-only restriction”: only the pivot in each clause may be extracted (4-6) (Keenan & Comrie 1977 *et seq*). I analyse *yang*-questions as *wh*-cleft questions similar to *Who is it that bought the book?*, following Cole et al. (1999). Evidence for a *wh*-cleft analysis (as opposed to *wh*-movement) comes from the possibility of multiple specifications of tense (7), which suggests that *yang*-questions are biclausal.

Moreover, *wh*-adjuncts are incompatible with *yang* (8) (Cole et al. 1999), consistent with relative clauses being generally incompatible with non-nominal heads, as I will show at the talk.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(7) Siapa <b>tadi</b> yang <b>bakal</b> nyapu?<br/>who PAST REL FUT sweep<br/>'Who was it who will sweep?'</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(8) <b>Di mana</b> (*<b>yang</b>) Budi beli buku=nya?<br/>at where (*REL) Budi buy book=DET<br/>'Where did Budi buy the book?'</li> </ol> |
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In the *yang*-less strategy, *wh*-arguments are in-situ. In transitive constructions, only post-verbal objects (9) and the demoted agent of the *di*-passive (10) may be *wh*-in-situ.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(9) Mia tadi (nge)-beli <b>apa</b>?<br/>Mia PAST SV-bought what<br/>'What did Mia buy?'</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(10) Lukisan=nya tadi di-beli ama <b>siapa</b>?<br/>painting=DET PAST PASS-buy with who<br/>'Who was the painting bought by?'</li> </ol> |
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All other positions in the transitive clause disallow *wh*-in-situ: i.e., no *wh*-in-situ in the all pivot positions (Cole et al., 2005) (demonstrated here using subject voice in (11)); and no *wh*-in-situ in the non-pivot agent in object voice (12).

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(11) * <b>Siapa</b> tadi (nge)-beli buku=nya?<br/>who PAST SV-buy book=DET<br/>Intended: 'Who bought the book?'</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(12) * Buku=nya tadi <b>siapa</b> beli?<br/>book=DET PAST who buy<br/>Intended: 'Who bought the book?'</li> </ol> |
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**No multiple *wh*-questions.** Given what we know about single *wh*-questions, there are conceivably two ways to ask a multiple *wh*-question: using the *yang*-strategy, as in (13), or the *yang*-less strategy, as in (14). Setting aside echo-questions, I will show with examples (in context) that neither of these are grammatical. This is consistent with claims that Standard Indonesian, a closely-related variety, does not allow any multiple *wh*-questions (Fortin, 2009; Kurniawan, 2013).

- (13) \*Siapa yang tadi milih siapa? (14) \*Siapa tadi milih siapa?  
 who REL PAST choose who who PAST choose who  
 Intended: ‘Who is it that chose who?’ Intended: ‘Who chose who?’

**Proposal.** There two independent but interacting constraints that rule out multiple *wh*-questions:

- a. (13) is ruled out due to a **general semantic constraint**. The information structural properties of clefts are incompatible with the meaning of multiple *wh*-questions, a robust cross-linguistic observation: cf. the ill-formedness of *Who is it that brought what?* in English.  
 b. (14) is ruled out due to **language-specific constraints** on the distribution of *wh*-in-situ. Most relevantly, the pivot cannot be *wh*-in-situ, as shown above in (11).

The interaction between these two independently observable constraints makes it impossible to realise multiple *wh*-questions with nominals in a transitive clause.

**Lack of multiple *wh*-questions is only apparent.** This proposal makes a key prediction. In configurations where none of these independent constraints hold, it should be possible to ask a multiple *wh*-question. Ditransitive constructions provide us with one such environment. While a *wh* direct object may always be in-situ, a *wh* indirect object may be in-situ only in the prepositional dative construction (15) and not the double bare object construction (16).

- (15) Lia masak-in nasi buat siapa? (16) \*Lia masak-in siapa nasi?  
 Lia cook-APPL rice for who Lia cook-APPL who rice  
 ‘Who did Lia cook rice for?’ Intended: ‘Who did Lia cook rice for?’

The analysis correctly predicts that it is possible to form a multiple *wh*-question in the prepositional dative construction (17) since *wh*-in-situ is allowed in both object positions. In contrast, multiple *wh*-questions are not possible in the double object construction (18) since the bare indirect object DP cannot be *wh*-in-situ. The grammaticality of (17) is also an argument against an analysis where multiple *wh*-questions are impossible because of the impossibility of multiple foci (see Fortin (2009) for Indonesian and Calabrese (1984) for Italian).

- (17) Lia masak-in apa buat siapa? (18) \*Lia masak-in siapa apa?  
 Lia cook-APPL what for who Lia cook-APPL who what  
 ‘What did Lia cook for who?’ Intended: ‘What did Lia cook for who?’

**Lessons for parameterisation.** My central claim is that the absence of multiple *wh*-questions is not due to one macroparameter. This is a welcome result: languages that seem to lack multiple *wh*-questions do not otherwise form a coherent typological class. Rather, I propose that the absence of multiple *wh*-questions is a result of a collection of microparameters. JI provides a clear case study because of independently observable microparameters in question formation.

**Select references:** • Cole & Hermon & Tjung 2005. *Studies in Language*. • Dayal 2016. *Oxford Academic*. • Fortin 2009. *Proceedings of AFLA 16*. • Kotek 2019. *LI Monographs*. • Kurniawan 2013. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*.