

Wh-Questions

Introduction

“Wh” -questions are important constructions that must be taught to EFL learners as they used to ask about a specific information. So, the need to use them often arises. “Wh”-questions are used when the speaker is missing a specific piece of information. For instance, these instructions are used in social interaction (*what’s your occupation?*), for getting directions (*where’s the market?*), in seeking explanations (*Why are you always late?*), and so forth.

English “wh”-questions are not acquired early presumably due to their variety and that they have two basic structures – one requiring inversion and one not.

The Form of Wh-Questions

- Variety of constituents

Consider the following sentence:

• **Maggie left a note about her departure to Chicago for her husband.**

A variety of constituents in this sentence can be queried in a wh-question:

Subject NP: Who left a note about her departure to Chicago for her husband? (Maggie)

Object NP: What did -Maggie leave for her husband? (a note about her departure to Chicago.)

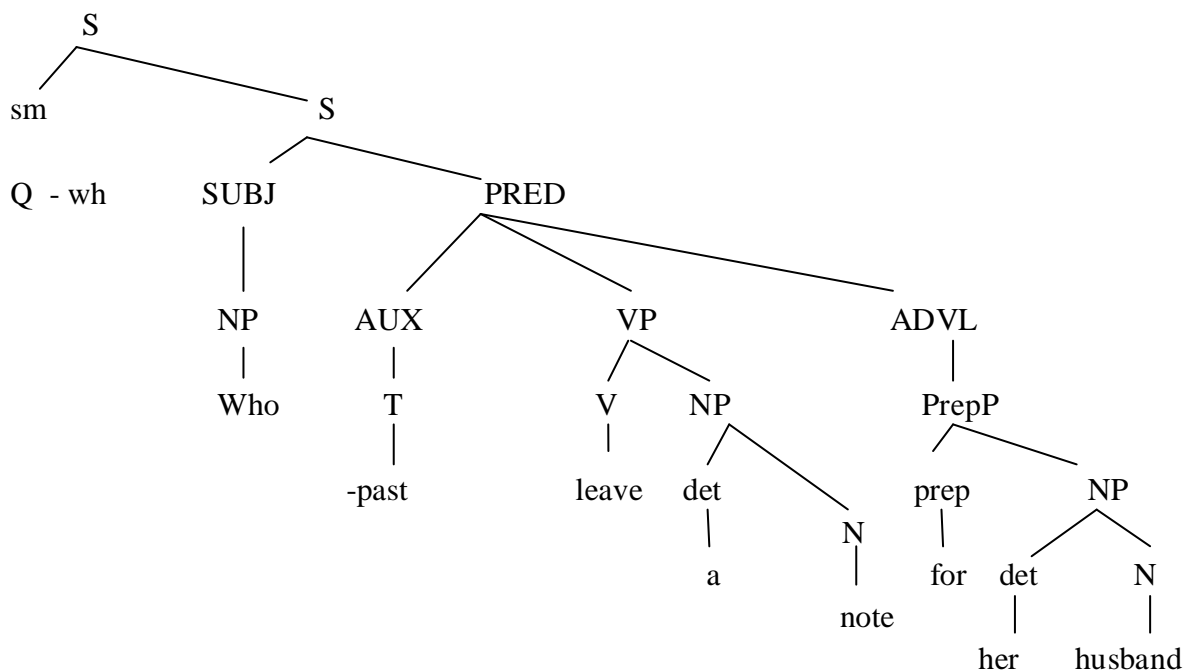
Object of the preposition: To whom did Maggie leave a note about her departure to Chicago? (her husband)

VP: What did Maggie do? (she left a note about her departure to Chicago for her husband.)

Determiner: Whose husband did Maggie leave a note about her departure to Chicago? (hers)

Underlying a “wh”-question is the assumption that some event or action has taken place or some state of affairs exists. The proposition expressing this assumption forms the basis for the tree.

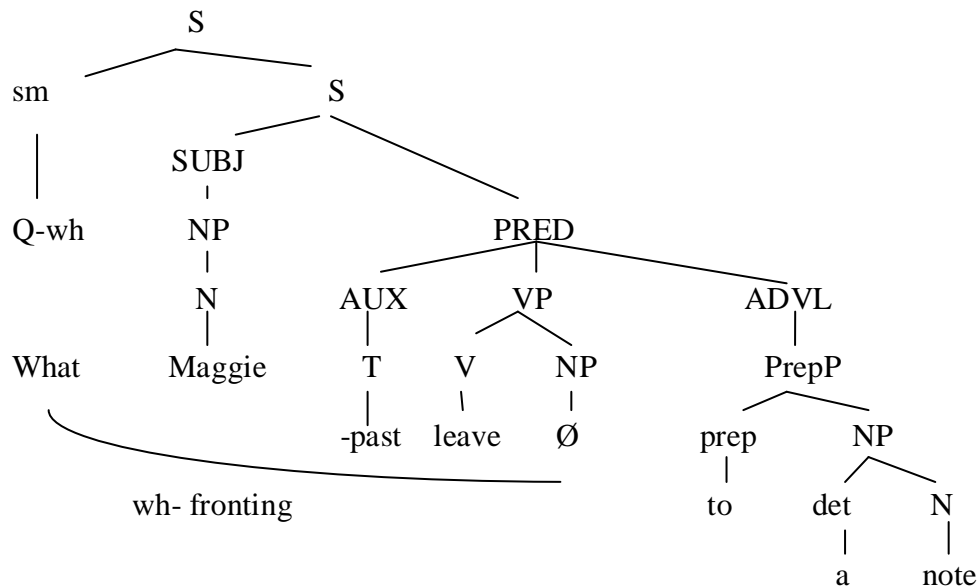
Who left a note for her husband ?



Two Basic Word Order: Subject Wh-Questions Versus Predicate Wh-Questions

The information gap is in the predicate; thus, the “*wh*”-question word is not in the sentence-initial position that it normally occupies English. In order to deal with this matter, we will have to move the “*wh*”-question word to the front of the sentence:

- **Who left a note for her husband?**



furthermore, every question we formed concerning Maggie, except for the subject-based “*wh*”-question, contains the do operator.

- **What did Maggie leave for her husband?**

Special Cases Involving Wh-Fronting

If a determiner or adverb intensifier is the focus of a “*wh-question*” word, the constituent it modifies must be moved to the front of the string.

- **Whose husband did Maggie leave a note for?**

Because it is the possessive determiner that is being queried, the corresponding “*wh-question*” word is “*whose*”, and both “*whose*” and the constituent it modifies must be moved to the front of the sentence with “*wh-*” fronting:

- **How fast did Maggie drive the car?**

Another special case exists when the object of the preposition is the unknown element. When “*wh-*” fronting is applied, the preposition may either be left behind or be moved to the front of the string along with the NP:

- **For whom did Maggie leave a note?**
- **Who(m) did Maggie leave a note for?**

Uninverted Wh-Questions:

These questions do not require “*wh-*” fronting and subject operator inversion. Sometimes these are just “echo” questions, in which the listener is signaling to the speaker that “he or she” didn’t hear a part of what was just said:

A: I am supposed to be visiting my parents for the weekend.

B: You are supposed to be visiting who for the weekend?

A: My parents.

EMPHATIC QUESTIONS WITH EVER:

Dismay: **Wherever did he appear?**

Admiration: **However will you manage to live on that income?**

Perplexity: **Whatever would that be useful?**

Negative Wh-Questions:

- **Who hasn’t finished their work yet?**
- **Why didn’t he attend the class?**

Elliptical Questions

- **Where you been hiding? “have” is the deleted auxiliary.**
- **What you (watcha) doing? “are” is the deleted auxiliary.**
- **How we going to (gonna) do that? “are” is the deleted auxiliary.**