On the Role of Skolem Functions in Modeling Multiple Wh Dependencies

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There exist several formal accounts of pair-list readings of interrogatives and correlatives with two wh phrases in them. This paper looks at two proposals for interpreting interrogatives: one is due to Dayal (2018), that builds on earlier work in Dayal (1996), the other is due to Fox (2012), who builds on ideas in Hagstrom (1998). While both interpret multiple wh constructions as sets of sets of propositions, there are two non-trivial differences between them. The former uses skolem functions to model dependencies while the latter does not; the set of sets of propositions in the first approach does not reduce to a set of questions, while it does in the latter. A recent proposal due to Xiang (2019), billed as a hybrid of the two, is also considered.

The paper tests these two approaches by extending the paradigm in three directions. The first extension is to generalize the accounts to both wh-wh and wh-quantifier interrogatives. The second extension is to apply these approaches to wh-wh and wh-quantifier dependencies in correlatives. The third extension tests the extent to which these approaches can capture potential dependencies between three wh phrases, between two wh phrases and one quantifier, and between one wh phrase and two quantifiers.

On the basis of these extensions, the paper argues that skolem functions are needed to adequately capture the empirical possibilities regarding wh dependencies observed in interrogatives and correlatives. The primary data are drawn from English and Hindi but effort is made to place the findings based on these two languages within a broader cross-linguistic perspective.