

Reduced *Wh*-Questions in the Xi'an Dialect: Evidence from Functional Markers

This study focuses on reduced *wh*-questions (RWQs) and provides new empirical evidence from the Xi'an dialect to explore the derivation of RWQs. In an RWQ, a *wh*-phrase remains in an embedded question, as illustrated in (1) and (2).

- (1) John kissed a girl, but I do not know [which girl].
- (2) You-ge nansheng da-le ta, danshi wo bu zhidao [(shi) nage nansheng].
exist-CL boy hit-ASP he but I not know shi which-CLboy
'A boy hit him, but I do not know which boy.'

Unlike English, Mandarin Chinese allows *shi* to optionally occur with the *wh*-phrase in RWQs, as shown in (2). The presence of *shi* has led to ongoing debate concerning the analysis of RWQs in Mandarin. Under the focus-movement analysis, *shi* is analyzed as a focus marker, and the *wh*-phrase undergoes focalization followed by TP-ellipsis (Wang & Wu 2006). In contrast, the pseudosluicing analysis assumes a copular structure in which the embedded clause contains a null pronominal subject *pro*, the copula *shi*, and a *wh*-phrase serving as the predicate (Wei 2004; Adams & Tomioka 2012).

This study investigates the derivation of RWQs by examining corresponding constructions in the Xi'an dialect, a representative variety of the Guanzhong dialects group. In the Xi'an dialect, the counterpart of the copular/focus marker *shi* (realized as *sʃ*) can also occur in RWQs. Furthermore, the Xi'an dialect exhibits some functional markers that are absent from Standard Mandarin. In particular, the marker *teiau* has been described as co-occurring with agent-denoting nominals and conveying an emphatic effect in certain constructions in previous studies of the Guanzhong dialects (Xing 2006; Sun 2013), though its syntactic properties and theoretical implications remain underexplored. Crucially, the present study shows that *teiau* is attested in RWQs, where it can co-occur with *wh*-phrases and the copular/focus marker *sʃ* under specific constraints. These distributional patterns suggest that the syntactic status of *teiau* bears directly on the derivation of RWQs.

Drawing on original fieldwork with native speakers of the Xi'an dialect, this study examines the distribution of the marker *teiau* and its interaction with *wh*-phrases and the copular/focus marker *sʃ* in RWQs. The observed patterns introduce new empirical constraints on the analysis of RWQs and have implications for whether RWQs involve genuine TP-ellipsis.

More broadly, this study demonstrates the value of fine-grained dialectal evidence in resolving long-standing theoretical debates in Chinese syntax. By demonstrating how the subtle properties of functional markers bear on the analysis of reduced structures, the study highlights the importance of incorporating dialectal data as a crucial foundation for both theoretical and data-driven research on Chinese.

References

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