

Multiple wh-questions in Sheshatshiu Innu-aimun

This paper looks at multiple wh-questions in Sheshatshiu Innu-aimun (henceforth SIA), a Central Algonquian language in the Cree-Montagnais-Naskapi dialect continuum within Algonquian language family (MacKenzie 1980). It asks the following question: Does SIA allow multiple wh-movement? The grammatical analysis of wh-questions in Algonquian languages has been a long-standing research topic since Bloomfield (1946). Johns (2008) asks whether these sentences are monoclausal or biclausal (i.e. clefts) in structure. A biclausal analysis is favoured for Rainy River Ojibwe (Johns 1982), Swampy Cree (Reinholtz and Russell 1995) and Plains Cree (Blain 1997). A monoclausal approach assumes that wh-questions are formed by wh-movement as in Western Naskapi (Brittain 1999, 2001) and Passamaquoddy (Bruening 2001).

Consider the following SIA examples from my fieldwork¹.

- (1) a. **Tshekuen** uiâpât-âk **tshekuânnû?**
who.3SG IC.see.TI-CONJ **what.3'SG**
 'Who saw something/anything?' (AN & MA 2023)
- b. **Tshekuen** **tshekuânnû** uiâpât-âk?
 'Who saw what?' (triggers a legitimate pair-list answer) (AN & MA 2023)
- c. ***Tshekuânnû** **tshekuen** uiâpât-âk?
 Intended: 'Who saw what?' (MA & JM 2023)

At first glance, the sentence in (1a) looks like a multiple wh-question because there are two wh-words *tshekuen* 'who' and *tshekuânnû* 'what'. However, I suggest that *tshekuânnû* is not an interrogative pronoun here given the evidence that wh-words are interpreted as indefinite pronouns in post-verbal position (Hamilton 2013, 2015). The wh-word *tshekuen* 'who' is an interrogative pronoun because it appears at the left periphery of the clause (i.e. Spec CP). *Tshekuânnû* is an indefinite pronoun meaning 'something/anything.' Therefore, (1a) is not a multiple wh-question in SIA.

(1b) and (1c) show that two wh-phrases appear to the left of the verb but in a strict word order. That is, the subject *tshekuen* 'who' must precede the object *tshekuânnû* 'what'. The reversed word order between these wh-words results in ungrammatical sentence as seen in (1c). This suggests that there exists a Superiority effect in SIA (Chomsky 1973, Boskovic 1997, 1999, 2002). The question in (1b) triggers a legitimate pair-list answer in a given context. Such answer serves as identifying an identificational-dependency relationship between the subject and the object (Erteschik-Shir 2007). In the pair-list answer, the subject answers to the highest wh-word *tshekuen* 'who' and the object answers to the lower wh-word *tshekuânnû* 'what'. Accordingly, two wh-words form the identificational-dependency relationship, and this suggests that (1b) is a multiple wh-question. In my analysis, I propose that SIA multiple wh-questions are constructed by multiple wh-movement, and I suggest that SIA multiple wh-questions have a discourse-configurational structure in the sense of Kiss (1995).

In a larger-scale context, this research continues the discussion on the syntactic configurations of Algonquian languages as well as on the ongoing debate about whether wh-questions in Algonquian languages are monoclausal or biclausal in structure.

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