

Disentangling free relatives, indirect interrogative and exclamative subordinate clauses

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Relative subordinates that do not incorporate an antecedent NP are commonly called free relatives: while dependent relative constructions are related syntactically and semantically to their (clausal or nominal) antecedent, the so-called free constructions have no such anaphoric properties. However the antecedent is not considered as being absent from the clause but as being included within the WH- subordinator, which is analysed as being equivalent semantically to ‘the thing(s) that’ (which explains why such constructions are also referred to as ‘fused relatives’):

(1) *I agree with **what you suggest / the thing(s) that you suggest***

Consequently, they are not modifiers within an NP but they occupy the functional slots of NPs, which can be easily illustrated by substituting an NP for the whole subordinate (hence the term ‘nominal relative’ which also very commonly applies to them):

(1') *I agree with **what you suggest / with your suggestion***

In Huddleston 2002 they are described as being ‘the most complex type of the four relative constructions’ (Huddleston 2002:1036). Accounting for them, syntactically and semantically, is indeed no easy matter, mainly for the reason that they belong to the larger set of WH-subordinates which comprises indirect interrogative and indirect exclamative clauses. The three types display a considerable degree of overlap, in form and in meaning, to the point that it is more often than not very difficult to distinguish one from the other. Consider for instance:

(2) *I know **what he is hiding up his sleeve***

(3) *Maybe he'll give me **what he is hiding up his sleeve***

(4) *I know **what a skilful conjurer he is***

In spite of the surface resemblances, the same subordinate (***what he is hiding up his sleeve***) is an indirect interrogative in (2) but a free relative in (3), and the same main clause (*I know*) is followed by an indirect interrogative in (2) but by an indirect exclamative in (4).

Or again, in the following examples:

(5) *It's amazing **what he can hide up his sleeve!***

(6) ***Whoever you may appoint**, he won't be satisfied*

what he can hide up his sleeve in (5) is not an exclamative, but an interrogative subordinate, in spite of the (misleading) content of the main clause, and the concessive *whoever you may appoint* in (6) is to be construed as an indirect interrogative, even though the relationship between concessives and interrogatives seems rather counter-intuitive (*cf.* example (17) below).

Therefore, free relatives, indirect interrogatives and indirect exclamatives (henceforth, for convenience sake, ‘relatives’, ‘interrogatives’ and ‘exclamatives’) constitute what one might

call a ‘fuzzy set’ (Trotta 2000:31), which most studies in the literature endeavour to disentangle, taking two different methodological paths.

One – the more common in the literature – consists in looking for differential properties (either syntactic or semantic), *i.e.* specific, exclusive features for each of the three structures. In this view, the presence or the absence of a given property is an indication of the nature of the observed clause (for instance, the insertion of *very* after *how* indicates that the clause is an exclamative ; or a non-finite infinitival subordinate is necessarily an interrogative, etc).

Another approach to the issue consists in looking for a unifying, pivotal property, with a view to showing that the structures under study not only show a family resemblance, but that they are actual siblings, to be related to a common parent structure: such models aim at showing not *how* the constructions can be differentiated, but *why* they display differences along with similarities.

1. Differential models

Differential studies in the literature (*cf.* in particular Huddleston 2002, Leonarduzzi 2004, Trotta 2000) arrive at more or less the same lists of criteria. More precisely, criteria differ in terms of number but they appear to be compatible and complementary, so that it seems not illegitimate to compile them into one list including the main differential properties. What is at stake here is not only to review them (§1.1 and §1.2 below) but also to assess them, to give an overall account of the methodology used, and to take a critical view of it by showing the limitations of such models (§1.3).

1.1 Syntactic differential properties

Most studies either focus on the binary opposition between relatives and interrogatives (§1.1.1 below), or aim at isolating exclamatives, thus opposing them to both relatives and interrogatives (§1.1.2).

1.1.1 Free relatives vs indirect interrogatives

Five main differential properties (DPs) can be collected from the literature.

◆ **DP 1:** Free relatives are highly nominal, interrogatives are clausal

Relatives indeed display nominal characteristics that interrogatives do not have. In particular:

- S-V agreement (7) *What books he reads are comics* / (7') *What books he has is a mystery*
- S-Aux inversion (8) *Could what you're hiding be something illicit?* / (8') **Could what version of Internet Explorer you have be checked?*
- Extraposition (9) **It is a dove what he is hiding up his sleeve* / (9') *It is a mystery what he is hiding up his sleeve*
- Antecedent (10) *Whatever I have that I don't need I'll pass on to you* / (10') **I'm not certain what he has that he doesn't need*
- Pied-piping (11) *Give me *with what he carved the wood* / (11') *I asked him on what he based his predictions*

Subject-verb agreement in (7), subject-auxiliary inversion in (8) and the compatibility with antecedent status in (10) are typically nominal characteristics that apply to relatives, but which interrogatives do not display (*cf.* (7'), (8') and (10')). Conversely, extraposition in (9) and pied-piping in (11) are not allowed with relatives, only with interrogatives (*cf.* (9') and (11')).

◆ **DP 2:** Sluicing occurs in interrogatives only

Sluicing is a type of ellipsis to be found in interrogative subordinates only, by which everything but the WH- subordinator is elided from the clause. As such, it is a good test to distinguish interrogatives from relatives, as illustrated in (12), (13) and (14) below:

(12) *She bought something and she remembers / and I know **what** [--]*

(13) **She bought something but she lost **what** [--]*

(14) *I know **what she bought** and **why** [--] / **who she met** and **when** [--]*

In (12), elliptical reduction is grammatical, which is an indication that the subordinate **what she bought** is an interrogative, even when the main clause is of the *I know* type, as shown in the second part of (12). This conclusion is reinforced by the coordination test in (14). In (13), with sluicing being ungrammatical, the subordinate is a free relative. Besides, the fact that clearly interrogative words (*why, who, when, etc*) can follow *I know* main clauses or be coordinated with the WHAT-clauses in (14) is also a clear indication that the subordinators are of the interrogative type.

◆ **DP 3:** Relatives require a finite form of the verb, while interrogatives can be infinitival

(15) *I know **what to drink** / *I need **what to drink***

Note here again that the *I know* main-clause type licenses interrogatives, not relatives.

◆ **DP 4:** Insertion of emotive modifiers is not possible in relatives

(16) *I wonder **what on earth he is doing** / (16') ***Whoever the hell said that** was wrong*

The possibility (or impossibility) of inserting such emotive modifiers as *on earth* or *the hell* is a test leading to the conclusion that (16) contains an interrogative, while (16') includes a relative.

It should be noted that the test is positive in concessive subordinators, as in (17) below:

(17) *We must be attractive – **whatever the hell that means**.*

◆ **DP 5:** The paradigm of subordinators as a clue to the nature of the clause

A number of studies consider that the subordinator can sometimes be considered as a distinctive criterion, since

- HOW, WHY and WHEN are not to be found in relatives (*cf.* DP 2 above).
- WHO, WHICH and WHERE are found in both types, but their use as relative pronouns is marginal, since it is restricted to the free choice construction (*Invite **who you like**, take **which you please**, go **where you want***), so that their presence in other contexts is indicative of an interrogative structure.

- Likewise, -EVER compounds (WHATEVER, WHOEVER, etc) are used in relatives mostly, with the marginal exception of concessive subordinates which are of an interrogative type.

1.1.2 Isolating indirect exclamatives

◆ DP 6: WHAT A as indicative of exclamatives

A sequence of WHAT + A can occur in exclamatives only, in the same way as only direct exclamatives can incorporate the indefinite article after WHAT:

(18) *I feel ashamed at **what a blunder I've made***

It should be noted that clauses that do not include the indefinite article (in cases of a plural or an uncountable noun) belong potentially to the three types:

(18') *I feel ashamed at **what blunders I made***

(18'') *He knows **what blunders I made***

(18''') *Give me **what money you have***

Depending on the context and the speaker's intention, (18'') can be interpreted as exclamative (*What blunders I made !*) or interrogative (*He knows the answer to the question 'What blunders did I make ?'*). It is more difficult to read (18') as interrogative, and even though such an interpretation might apply (*the type of blunders I made*), the more natural interpretation is exclamative. No exclamatory meaning can be read into (18'''), and the subordinate therefore is a free relative (*cf.* DP 12 below).

◆ DP 7: Insertion of VERY after HOW as indicative of exclamatives

Since HOW exclamatives include gradable adjectives, they allow the insertion of adverbial VERY with an intensifying meaning:

(19) *I remember **how very old they were***

So that, if the test holds, (19') below contains an exclamative after an *I know*-type clause (*cf.* (18'') above):

(19') *I know **how very old they were***

Note that the use of an exclamative subordinate after a factive verb like *know* seems to have a polyphonic quality pertaining to its necessarily anaphoric nature:

(19'') *Mary: **They were so old !***

John: *I know (**how (very) old they were**)*.

In other contexts the reading will be definitely interrogative:

(19''') *I know **how old they were** but I won't tell you*

◆ DP 8: The paradigm of subordinators as a clue to the nature of the clause

The paradigm of subordinators which is often appealed to to differentiate a relative from an interrogative is also often extended to exclamatives. The point made is that exclamatives cannot incorporate any other subordinator than WHAT or HOW, so that the presence of a different WH- word indicates that the clause is either interrogative or relative.

◆ **DP 9:** Coordination tests

Coordination of a subordinate with a clause that is undoubtedly an interrogative helps to determine its nature:

(20) *It's amazing **what he did and who he appointed***

Considering DPs 5 and 8, **who he appointed** is an interrogative. The other conjunct, namely **what he did**, is therefore interrogative as well.

1.2 **Semantic differential properties**

Along with the 9 syntactic DPs, differential models appeal to some or all of five main semantic criteria, *i.e.* differences in meaning to disentangle the tripartite set.

◆ **DP 10:** Only free relatives are semantically referential

In this view, the subordinate clause has the nominal property of referring to an extralinguistic entity, either concrete or abstract. In other words, only relatives are endowed with exophoric reference.

(3) *Maybe he'll give me **what he is hiding up his sleeve**
..... *the red scarf**

(2) *I know **what he is hiding up his sleeve**
.... * *the red scarf**

(4) *I know **what a skilful conjurer he is**
..... * *NP**

Substitution of an NP is therefore possible in (3), but not in (2) (which again shows that *I know* main clauses are NOT followed by relatives). Nor is such replacement grammatical in the case of exclamatives, as in (4). The semantic content of interrogatives and exclamatives cannot be construed in referential terms. The question therefore remains of the type of information conveyed in such clauses (*cf.* §2 below).

◆ **DP 11:** The semantic content of the main clause is indicative of the nature of the subordinate

Only a handful of linguists today restrict the occurrence of interrogatives to sentences of the *I don't know* type, *i.e.* with the main clause expressing a need to elicit information from the hearer. On the whole, it is agreed in the literature that the illocutionary value of the whole utterance need not be a question, which entails that:

- *I know* main clauses license interrogatives (note the underlined DPs):

(2') *I know **what he is hiding up his sleeve** and why / I know who's coming*

- Main clauses expressing surprise may be followed by exclamatives (as in (21) below) OR interrogatives (as in (22) ; note the underlined DPs):

(21) *It's amazing how very little difference that makes*

(22) *It's amazing **what they did** / who they appointed*

◆ **DP 12:** The meaning of determiner WHAT is indicative of the nature of the clause
If it appears that the meaning of determiner WHAT is that of ‘referring to the whole of an amount’, as in (23) below, then the subordinate is a free relative. If not, the clause is either interrogative (as in (24)) or exclamative:

(23) *What free time he had was spent with the family*

(24) *They did not know / they knew what free time he had*

◆ **DP 13:** Only pseudo clefts incorporate the specifying use of BE

Pseudo-clefts are structures tying in with information packaging in which a foregrounded nominal predicative complement after BE identifies the referent of a subject WH- clause. Now, pseudo-clefts are very similar superficially to two constructions in which a WHAT subordinate is followed by BE and a predicative complement (either nominal or adjectival), as is illustrated in (25), (26) and (27) below:

(25) *What he proposed first was a new deal*

(26) *What he proposed first was nonsense / stupid*

(27) *What he proposed first was a mystery / unclear*

Only (25) is a pseudo-cleft insofar as the predicate, which includes the specifying use of BE (Huddleston 2002:1421), provides the identification of the referent of the WH-subordinate (*What he proposed first* and *a new deal* are co-referential). The subordinate in pseudo-clefts is always a free relative (note for instance that the subject-verb inversion test applies (*cf.* DP 1), and that it is clearly referential (DP10)).

The use of BE in (26) is attributive, not specifying, so that the predicative complement is not a means to identify the referent of the subordinate but an expression of a property of it (note that an adjective is possible too).

(26) therefore is not a pseudo-cleft, even though the subordinate is a free relative.

In (27), with the main clause expressing a lack of information, the subordinate is an indirect interrogative, and the whole construction is not a pseudo-cleft. The predicative complement does not provide the identification of the content of the subordinate, but on the contrary expresses the speaker’s difficulty to identify it.

◆ **DP14:** Relatives and interrogatives express different types of variables

This differential property is based on the suggestion that both relatives and interrogatives express a variable (the criterion is unfortunately not extended to exclamatives), and that the variable does not have the same interpretation in the two constructions.

In interrogatives, as in (2) below,

(2) *I know what he is hiding up his sleeve*

WHAT is analysed as a variable referring to a set of possible answers, the value of the variable being provided by the answer to the question *What is he hiding up his sleeve ?*

In relatives, as in (3):

(3) *Maybe he’ll give me what he is hiding up his sleeve*

the variable is considered as expressing ‘the x such that he was hiding x up his sleeve’ (cf. Huddleston 2002:1071), and the value of the variable is provided by the content of the relative clause .

In interrogatives, the missing information is elicited from the hearer (typically in the *Tell me* type of main clauses) or implicitly evoked (*I know* clauses), while in relatives the information is supplied, at least partially, by the content of the subordinate clause.

Considering WH-words as variables echoes back to the notion of WH- as a marker of indeterminacy, a semantic or information gap, which is a hypothesis commonly put forward in the theory of enunciative operations.

It should be noted that exclamatives are not included into this analysis, so that the question of whether the WH-word also pertains to this value remains unanswered: To what extent indeed does it code a variable, or a semantic gap in exclamatives ? The question remains largely unanswered in the literature.

1.3 Concluding remarks: taking a critical view at the differential model

The table below sums up the various syntactic and semantic differential properties that are claimed as accounting for the difference between the three constructions.

Syntactic DPs	Semantic DPs
DP1 Nominal properties	DP 10 Relatives are referential
DP2 Sluicing	DP 11 Content of main clause
DP3 Infinitival clauses	DP 12 Meaning of ‘what’
DP4 Insertion tests	DP 13 WH- + BE + N
DP5 Subordinators	DP 14 Variable
DP6 What + a	
DP7 Insertion tests	
DP8 Subordinators	
DP9 Coordination test	

The criteria in this rather long list – which is not comprehensive – make up a very heterogeneous set, with a mixture of different levels of analysis - syntactic and semantic. One further illustration of the problem is Le Goffic’s classification of relatives and interrogatives as *integrated* (*intégrative*; a syntactic basis) vs *percontatorial* (*percontatives*; a semantic basis)¹. This is all the more problematic as the possible relationships between form and meaning are hardly ever explored, or only tentatively. To take only one example: To what extent are the semantic properties of relatives related to their nominal characteristics, or the clausal characteristics of interrogatives to the type of variable that they express ? The model largely fails to explore the possibilities of logical links between form and meaning.

One further limitation of the differential model is that a number of criteria help to determine what the clause *is not*, but *not what it is*, especially if the three structures are taken into the analysis rather than grouped in pairs (e.g. DPs 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).

¹ Le Goffic 1993, § 22 and §23

More generally, the structures are generally grouped two by two (relatives vs interrogatives, interrogatives vs exclamatives), and more often than not exclamatives are not included in the analysis.

What can also be felt as a limitation is that the model gives an atomized representation of the object, an exploded view, which conceals the basic unity of it – which paradoxically is the initial observation that triggers the necessity of devising a model to account for the set of structures.

2. Unifying models

Rather than focusing on the differences, a number of models seek to find some pivotal property that unifies the set. In this view differences are seen not as distinctive properties but as the expression of some functional specialisation deriving from a common semantic property.

Two main unifying models can be found in the literature: one is based on the notion of *scanning*, and the other on the idea that different types of *profiling* are involved.

2.1 Scanning

What follows is but a very brief overview of the theory, with an aim at pointing to its main limitations (for a detailed account, see in particular Le Goffic 1994).

The theory of scanning is mainly based on the observation that WH- conveys an indefinite/ignorative value that goes back to I.E. *Kw. As a consequence, WH- can be seen as coding a variable, an 'x'.

In interrogatives scanning implies the *selection* of a value (insofar as the hearer is requested to provide the value of the variable (*Tell me **when he was born***); or because the knowledge of it is implied (*I know **when he was born***)).

In generic free relatives scanning implies the *rejection* of a value, since just any value applies to the variable (*Give me **what(ever) you like***).

In exclamatives, scanning is described as applying to a *set of extreme values*.

The limitations of the theory are exposed in a number of articles (*cf.* in particular Dufaye 2006 and Melis 2006).

Two main problems should be raised for the purpose of this study:

- How can scanning account for relatives with specific reference? In (3) for instance there is no set of objects to scan:

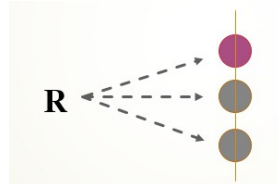
(3) *Maybe he'll give me **what he is hiding up his sleeve***

- How can the notion of extreme values in exclamatives be derived from the notion of scanning? This is not made explicit in the theory, and yet the passage from the notion of scanning to that of scanning a subset of extreme values is no obvious matter.

2.2 Profiling

Langacker's account of the difference between free relatives and indirect exclamatives is based on the notion of *profiling*. The gist of it (cf. Langacker 2001 and Khalifa 2001 for a detailed account) is that the main difference between the two constructions is a question of focus (or *profiling*).

With relatives ('R' on the schematic representation below) *profiling* is conferred on one extralinguistic entity (symbolised by the pink dot) chosen within a range of alternatives:

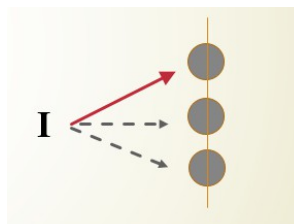


In (28) below the entity corresponding to the relative *what you paint* can thus be seen as chosen within a range of alternatives including for instance the referents of *what you write*, *what he paints*, etc:

(28) *I like what you paint* (vs *what you write* / *what he paints* / ...)

This view, which echoes back to the notion of free relatives being referential (cf. § 1.2, DP 10 above) is interesting not *per se* perhaps, but contrastively, *i.e.* when compared to the function of subordinate interrogatives:

With interrogatives ('I' on the schematic representation below) *profiling* is conferred on the *path of choice* (symbolized by the pink arrow), *i.e.* the mental activity that leads to the selection of an entity ('*an array of alternative potential paths of mental process present themselves, one of which is followed to the exclusion of others*' (Langacker 2001:29)):



The argument that interrogatives evoke a mental process and not a real-world entity is neatly illustrated by Langacker in (29) below, in which the anaphoric link between neutral *it* (rather than animate *he*) and *who stole the money* is evidence that the subordinate does not refer to an entity but some abstract mental activity:

(29) *We discovered who stole the money and we found it disturbing*

But again the model is not entirely satisfactory, to the extent first of all that the notion of *mental path* needs refining: one should expect the model also to account for the *type* of mental

activity that takes place in a speaker's mind when they use an indirect interrogative, and certainly too when they use a relative. Besides, is the *mental path* of the same nature in interrogatives and in relatives? If not, the type of activity that leads to the selection of an entity in the latter construction should be made explicit too.

A further important limitation of Langacker's theory is that it leaves aside exclamatives, and concentrates on the other two structures only. How can it be extended to this third type of indirect WH- subordinate ?

3. A proposal

What follows is a proposal of a unifying model that takes into account all three structures - to be taken mainly as food for thought.

The suggestion made here is that what WH- codes basically is indeterminacy (which many authors agree upon), and more precisely that in the three constructions under study indeterminacy is to be understood in terms of *a problematic mental access to a referent*, or, in other words, *a lack of referential accessibility*. Access to the referent is problematic, but the problem that presents itself is different in free relatives, indirect interrogatives and indirect exclamatives.

3.1 Lack of referential accessibility in indirect interrogatives

In interrogatives WH- codes an unknown ²: interrogatives, direct or indirect, can be represented in the form of an equation:

(30) *Tell me when he was born* (X= ?)

(31) *I know when he was born* (X= ?)

The speaker either requests the hearer to solve the equation for him (as in direct interrogatives, or interrogative subordinates like (30), *i.e.* of the *I don't know* type), or he expresses that he is able to solve it himself (as in (31), *i.e.* subordinates of the *I know* type). In both cases, it is the (known or unknown) solution of the equation that is evoked. This remains indeterminate, inaccessible (for the speaker in the *I don't know* type, for the hearer in the *I know* type). Referential indeterminacy is thus either speaker- or hearer-oriented. The solution of the equation is indeterminate to the extent that it remains unknown, as in (30), or unsaid, as in (31). This explains why substitution of the expression of the solution for the subordinate is impossible:

(31') *I know when he was born* / **I know March 19th, 1960*

But such sentences as in (31'') below are acceptable because *the date* or *the answer* are as indeterminate referentially as the interrogative subordinate (they refer only indirectly to the solution without giving it):

² The distinction between a variable and an unknown is crucial in the analysis of the three structures (and never taken into account in the literature, where linguists systematically refer to *variables*). A variable is an x that takes different values in a mathematical formula, as in the formula 2x to calculate the price of pens (x) when each costs 2 euros. An unknown is an x whose value is looked for, as in 'How many books did John buy ?' knowing that the price of one book is 10 euros and that John spent a total of 30 euros ?

(31'') *I know **the date / the answer***

Remarkably enough, replacement of the subordinate by its solution in (31''') below necessitates quotation marks:

(31''') I told her **when he was born** / **I told her **March 19th, 1960*** / *I told her 'March 19th, 1960'*

This is certainly a further indication of the non-nominal, non-referential, hence non-relative status of WH- subordinates in sentences that are clearly not questions.

Although what is claimed here is that interrogatives refer to a mental process (an equation), the proposal differs from Langacker's in that indeterminacy does not apply to the mental activity itself, but to the result of it. The mental activity is defined here as *an equation solving process*, and indeterminacy applies to *the solution of the equation*.

3.2 Lack of referential accessibility in free relatives

Access to the referent in the case of relatives is problematic in different ways depending on the type of construction: a very clear distinction must be established between subordinates with specific and generic reference.

3.2.1 Free relatives with specific reference

This type includes clauses which refer to a specific (singular or plural) referent, as in:

(32) *Give me **what you're hiding behind your back***

(33) *Je voterai **pour qui je voterai*** (Le Goffic 1994:34)

The claim here is that access to the referent is problematic because the specific construction is periphrastic by nature: the speaker provides access to the referent only indirectly, not by naming it but *via* one of its characteristics (its being behind the hearer's back in (32)). The characteristic is given by the content of the relative subordinate. The speaker may do so for lack of knowledge of the precise identity of the referred entity (which is one possible reading of (32)), or because he deliberately chooses to (note the rhetorical nature of the tautological sentence in (33), in which the speaker deliberately withholds their candidate's name). Therefore, to use a specific free relative is tantamount to using a *periphrasis*, so that indeterminacy in such a clause is equivalent to *opacification* of the referent.

3.2.2 Free relatives with generic reference

Generic reference is to be found either in the free choice construction (*cf.* §1.1.1, DP5 above) or in subordinates where the subordinator is an -EVER compound. Example (34) below illustrates both cases:

(34) *Choose **what(ever) colour you like***

Lack of referential accessibility is due to the referent being a variable (not an unknown: *cf.* note 2 above). The referent is the whole set of possible solutions of the equation, with all possible values within the set satisfying the equation. In (34), from the speaker's point of view, all colours satisfy the equation. This can be represented as:

$x = \{c_1 ; \dots ; c_n\}$ (all possible colours ('c') satisfy the equation 'colour = ?').

So that with generic free relatives referential indeterminacy lies in the absence of selection of a referent within a set, which is expressed *via* the universal value of the WH- word.

3.3 Lack of referential accessibility in subordinate exclamatives

Exclamatives can be claimed to express some problematic mental representation of the referent as well. In (35), which is a declarative:

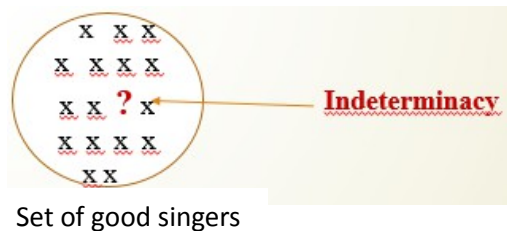
(35) *Fiona is a good singer*

a value is attributed to Fiona insofar as she is said to belong to the class of good singers (note the use of the classifying indefinite article in the predicative complement).

Now, in the exclamative counterpart - direct or indirect:

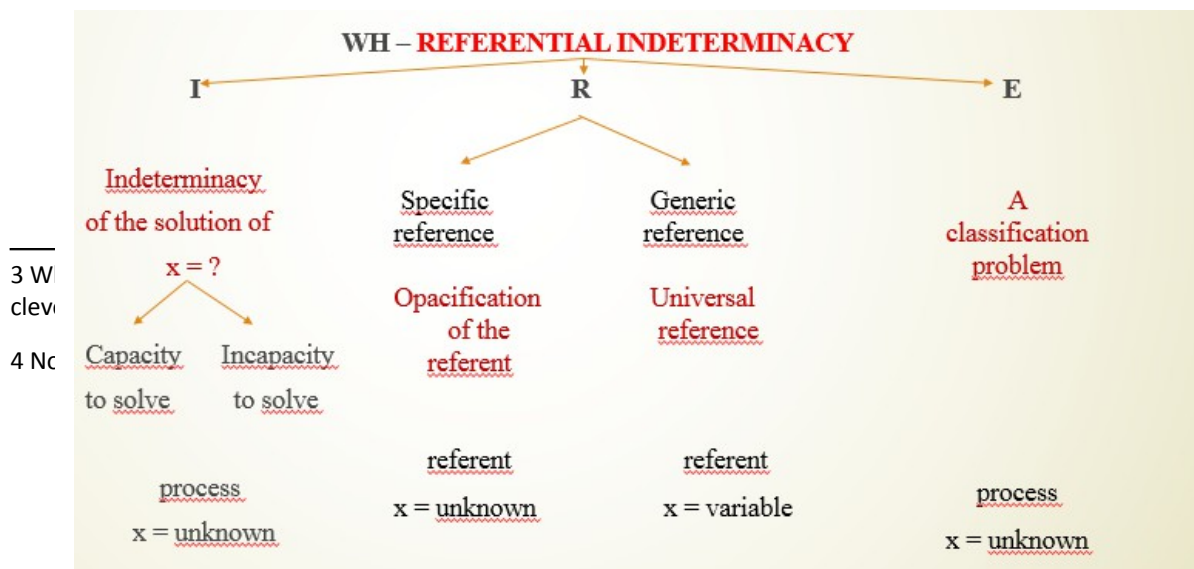
(36) *(It is incredible) What a good singer Fiona is!*

it can be argued that the indeterminacy conveyed by WHAT – a predeterminer syntactically – bears precisely on this value. The value therefore is both explicit (*Fiona is a good singer*) and indeterminate at the same time. What can be claimed, to solve the paradox, is that the speaker expresses his incapacity to associate Fiona with the property of being a good singer. He questions her inclusion in the set of good singers (*Fiona is a good singer?*), the expression of doubt being conveyed by the fundamental ignorative value of WH-. Classification of Fiona in the set of good singers is problematic, and the value (*being a good singer*) becomes an unknown, which can be schematically represented as follows:



It should be noted that in this view exclamatives, like interrogatives, do not refer to an extralinguistic entity, but are the expression of a problem to solve, some inner questioning, a mental process (quite similar therefore to that found in interrogatives³).

Consequently, what exclamatives express - rhetorically- is that the value explicitly mentioned after the WH- word is EX-ceptional⁴ - which is what leads to a high degree *effect*: exclamatives are only incidentally markers of high degree, but not intrinsically.



This model claims that the unifying property of the tripartite set of constructions is *referential indeterminacy*, which has four contextual interpretations:

- In subordinate interrogatives as being the *indeterminacy of the solution of the equation* (a mental process) denoted by the subordinate clause
- In free relatives as being due either to *opacification* of the referent (specific reference) or to its *universal value*, which is indeterminate by its very nature (generic reference)
- In subordinate exclamatives as being a *classification problem*

3.5 Differential properties revisited

If the model is valid, it should account for the various syntactic or semantic properties associated with the three structures. In other words, it should be possible to match the four semantic contextual interpretations of referential indeterminacy (*cf.* §3.4 above) with the various differential properties characterising the three constructions.

The following is only a brief analysis of just a selection of DPs, for want of space.

3.5.1 DP1 revisited (Free relatives only are highly nominal)

Since interrogatives and exclamatives denote a process (either a solving process in the case of interrogatives or a classifying process in the case of exclamatives) and not an extralinguistic entity, it is not surprising that they should not have so many nominal characteristics as free relatives. Of course they do have some nominal properties which stem from the fact that they are embedded in a nominal slot within the matrix clause. This hybrid character is one more indication that the syntactic perspective is not a satisfactory entry point to account for them.

3.5.2 DP3 revisited (Interrogatives only can be infinitival)

What is argued here is that free relatives and exclamatives are incompatible with the prospective nature of TO, each in its own way:

- Periphrases (to which free specific relatives can be assimilated) are successful only if the hearer has some *prior knowledge* of the referent
- The universal value of generic free relatives, by essence, precludes any prospective *selection* of a referent

- Exclamatives code a *re-action* to an event, so have an intrinsic anaphoric dimension

3.5.3 DP 13 revisited (Only pseudo-clefts incorporate the specifying use of BE)

Pseudo-clefts can be seen now as a clarification process in which an *opacified* referent is *disopacified* thanks to an NP (the predicative complement), as in:

(37) *What I need is a cup of tea*

In (37), *What I need* has an opaque referent, access to which is only minimally given by one of its characteristics (*I need x*). *A cup of tea* serves as a disopacifying NP, and the identification process between the two referents is made possible by specifying BE.

Since it is precisely free specific relatives that have the function of opacifying a referent, they are naturally included in pseudo-clefts ⁵. On the contrary, there is no clarification process at stake with interrogatives, as illustrated in (38):

(38) *What he needs is a mystery / is crystal clear*

The referent of *what he needs* is not made explicit: it is not the referent that is directly evoked by the subordinate; or, more precisely, the referent is the solution of the equation, which remains unknown, is not disopacified - which is typical of subordinate interrogatives. This accounts for the incompatibility between pseudo-clefts and interrogatives.

4. Concluding remarks

More differential models are found in the literature than unifying representations of the fuzzy set, especially when it comes to taking into account all three types of WH- subordinates. Exclamatives in most cases fail to be included in the analysis, even though they descend from the same parent indefinite/ignorative ancestor.

Nearly all studies agree on the idea that the set includes subordinates that can be considered as *relatives*, even though they are not bound anaphorically to an antecedent constituent. However, the very categorization of such clauses into the set of relative constructions should perhaps be re-analysed.

Indeed, the notion of fusion between the antecedent and the subordinator derives from the possible replacement of the WH- word by ‘the thing(s)/person(s) that’ ⁶ which leads to the conclusion that the subordinate is equivalent to some (semantically) indefinite entity (a ‘thing’) about which something is predicated. Now, precisely, with free relatives, whose initial element is a mere signal of referential indeterminacy, the WH- subordinator is by no

5 It can be added that reversed pseudo-clefts (*A cup of tea is what I need*) can be seen conversely as a form of clarification process of the reference of an NP (*A cup of tea*) via additional information conveyed by the WH- clause.

6 This is a very misleading test. Such sentences as *??I know the thing that you're hiding* or *??The thing that he needs is crystal clear* or *??I know the person who came* are erroneous glosses of interrogative subordinates. One cannot *know* a thing, nor can a thing *be crystal clear*, and knowing a person has a different meaning from that of knowing the identity of *the person who came*.

means anaphoric, but rather a-phoric⁷ by essence, and there is no idea of any binding, be it of a syntactic or a semantic nature. As Le Goffic claims, therefore, ‘*il s’agit d’un indéfini, pour lequel la question d’un antécédent ne se pose pas*’ (Le Goffic 1993:46).

After all, the so-called free relatives pertain perhaps not so much to relative structures but rather to what might be called more appropriately indefinite WH-structures.

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7 Cf. WILMET 1998 : 267

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