Wh-indefinites in East Asian languages

Abstract

This paper investigates syntactic and semantic behaviors of *wh*-indefinites in Chinese, Japanese and Korean when they receive an existential reading, and identifies the source of such a reading in the three languages. The observation is that Japanese and Korean pattern together in terms of the behavior of their complex *wh*-indefinites, while Chinese and Korean show apparently different behaviors regarding their bare *wh*-indefinites. However, a closer scrutiny suggests that bare *wh*-indefinites in Korean and Chinese share more commonalities than has been reported in the literature in that they both can have an apparently exceptional wide scope reading when they are interpreted as indicating a specific referent.

Keywords: *wh*-words, interrogative, indefinite, scope

1 Introduction

It is well known that *wh*-interrogative words in Chinese, Japanese and Korean (henceforth CJK) can be used to make non-interrogative expressions. For example, all the sentences in (1)-(3) express the same meaning ‘I don’t need anything’, in which the negative polarity item (NPI) ‘anything’ is expressed by a phrase containing the *wh*-word ‘what’.

(1) Chinese

Shenme	***dou***	*bu*	*yao.*
what	**all**	NEG	need

(2) Japanese
Nani-mo *iranai.*
what-also need.NEG

(3) Korean
Mwues-to *philyochi* *anhta.*
what-also need NEG

In addition to the NPI reading as shown in the above example, *wh*-words in CJK can be used for existential or universal quantificational readings, or a free choice item (FCI) reading as well. Table 1 presents various expressions based on the *wh*-word 'who' in CJK, illustrating the versatility of *wh*-words in those languages.

Table 1. Expressions based on the *wh*-word 'who' in CJK

	Interrogative 'who'	Existential 'someone'	Universal 'everyone'	NPI 'anyone'	FCI 'anyone'
Chinese	*shei*	*shei*	*shei dou*	*shei dou*	*shei dou*
Japanese	*dare*	*dare-ka*	*dare-mo*	*dare-mo*	*dare-demo*
Korean	*nwukwu*	*nwukwu(-nka)*	*nwukwu-na*	*nwukwu-to*	*nwukwu-lato*

The non-interrogative uses of interrogative words in CJK have long received attention in the East Asian linguistics literature (e.g. Chinese: Huang 1982, Cheng 1991, Li 1992, Lin 1998, Aldridge 2007, Dong 2009; Japanese: Kuroda 1965, Nishigauchi 1990, Watanabe 1992, Shimoyama 2006, Yatsushiro 2009, Kinuhata & Whitman 2011; Korean: Chang 1973, Chung 1996, Jang 1999, Kim 2000, Yi 2000, Ha 2004, Yoon 2005; Comparative studies: Suh 1989, Aoun & Li 1993, Tsai 1994). In this paper, I will discuss the indefinite use of *wh*-expressions in CJK languages (henceforth *wh*-indefinites), focusing on the case where they have *existential* quantificational force. The indefinite

use of *wh*-words exhibits an interesting typological pattern because the three languages all differ in the possible forms of *wh*-indefinites. Chinese allows the bare form of *wh*-words to be used as indefinites (e.g. the word *shei* 'who' can also mean 'someone') but Japanese requires *wh*-words to combine with a bound morpheme to receive an indefinite reading (e.g. the word *dare* 'who' needs the indefinite marker *-ka* to mean 'someone'), whereas Korean allows both types of *wh*-indefinites (e.g. *nwukwu* 'who' can mean 'someone' by itself or by combining with the explicit marker *-nka*). The syntactic and semantic behaviors of the different types of *wh*-indefinites in the three languages are even more puzzling, since Japanese and Korean pattern together in terms of the behavior of their CWIs, while Chinese and Korean BWIs show apparently different behaviors as we will see later in the paper.

This paper aims at achieving two goals. The first goal is to investigate *wh*-indefinites in all three languages closely and provide a systematic comparison between them. The second goal is to find an account for why Chinese and Korean differ in the behaviors of their BWIs. The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents data in Chinese and Japanese and demonstrates how they match with the cross-linguistic typological generalization, and reviews previous analyses for *wh*-indefinites to explain the different behaviors of Chinese and Japanese. Section 3 focuses on Korean data which seems to make an apparent exception to the typology, and presents an analysis for that. Section 4 concludes the paper.

2 *Wh*-indefinites in Chinese and Japanese

2.1 Data

The indefinite use of *wh*-interrogatives must be marked by a particle *-ka* in Japanese, whereas no such marker is required in Chinese. In other words, Chinese has the bare form of *wh*-indefinites

(BWIs henceforth), while Japanese has a complex form of *wh*-indefinites (CWIs hencefourth). *Wh*-indefinites in Chinese and Japanese differ not only in their forms, but also in their syntactic and semantic properties: Chinese *wh*-indefinites occur in more restricted environments than Japanese *wh*-indefinites. In fact, the limited distribution of BWIs, compared to CWIs, has been noted cross-linguistically (e.g. German, Dutch, Classical Greek, Russian: see Haspelmath 1997 and Bruening 2007 for typological surveys). The following enumerates some common distinctions between BWIs and CWIs in the world's languages and shows how Chinese BWIs and Japanese CWIs fit into the cross-linguistic pattern.

First, BWIs cannot appear in the beginning of the sentence, while CWIs can (Cheng 1991, Haspelmath 1997, Aldridge 2007). For example, the only available reading of the Chinese sentence in (4) is an interrogative reading 'who came?' and it cannot have an indefinite reading. On the other hand, CWIs can appear in the beginning of the sentence as in the Japanese example (5).

(4) ***Shei*** *lai* *le*
who come PERF
'*Someone came.'

(5) ***Dare-ka-ga*** *kita*
who-EX-NOM come.PAST
'Someone came.'

Second, BWIs cannot be moved out of the base position, whereas CWIs and regular indefinites can (Postma 1994). Although topicalization is a quite common process in Chinese (Ramsey 1987), a BWI cannot move by topicalization as shown in (6). On the other hand, a CWI in Japanese can can be freely moved out of its base position, as shown in (7).[1]

[1] A reviewer remarks that the comparison should be based on the same type of movement operation and raises a question about the acceptability of topicalizaed Japanese CWIs. The topic marker -*wa* after a CWI indeed sounds odd

(6) a. *Wo xiang mai* ***shenme dongxi.***
I want buy **what thing**
'I want to buy something.'

b. ***Shenme dongxi*** *wo xiang mai.*
what thing I want buy
'*I want to buy something.'

(7) a. *Watashi-wa* ***nani-ka-o*** *kai-tai.*
I-TOP **what-EX-ACC** buy-want
'I want to buy something.'

b. ***Nani-ka-o*** *watashi-wa kai-tai.*
what-EX-ACC I-TOP buy-want
'I want to buy something.'

Third, BWIs do not take wide scope in general (Li 1992, Bruening 2007). For example, they cannot take scope over negation. The Chinese example in (8) can only mean that he did not eat anything, and cannot mean that there is a certain thing that he did not eat. However, such a wide scope reading is possible with CWIs, as in the Japanese example (9).[2]

(8) *Ta mei chi* ***shenme.***
he NEG eat **what**
'He didn't eat anything.'

(9) *Kare-wa* ***nani-ka****-o tabe-nakatta.*
he-TOP **what-EX-**ACC eat-NEG.PAST.DECL
'He didn't eat something.'

Fourth, BWIs cannot escape scope islands, while CWIs and regular indefinites can. As is well known, certain constructions do not allow quantifiers in them to take scope outside of them (Ross

if it appears out of blue, but it does not seem impossible when an appropriate context is given. The judgments I elicited from Japanese speakers suggest that a topicalized CWI is acceptable if it is contrastive, followed by a focused item.

[2] In (9), a wide scope reading of the indefinite is in fact strongly preferred. As we will see later, this supports the choice function analysis of CWIs (cf. Kratzer 1998).

1967). The sentence in (10) only means that May will be happy in case everyone comes to the party, and it cannot mean that for everyone, May will be happy if that person comes to the party. This illustrates that an *if*-clause creates a scope island because the quantificational expression *everyone* cannot take scope over *if*. However, the sentence in (11) can mean either May will be happy if someone (whoever it is) comes to the party or there is a specific person such that May will be happy if that person comes to the party. This illustrates that indefinite expressions such as *someone* can escape scope islands.

(10) If everyone comes to the party, May will be happy. (if > every, *every > if)
(11) If someone comes to the party, May will be happy. (if > some, some > if)

When it comes to *wh*-indefinites, only CWIs are known to escape scope islands. The following examples illustrate that the BWI *shenme ren* 'someone' in Chinese cannot be interpreted outside of the *if*-clause, while the CWI *dare-ka* 'someone' in Japanese can take scope over the *if*-clause.

(12) *Yaoshi* ***shenme*** ***ren*** *lai, Mei hui hen gaoxing.*
if **what** **person** come Mei will very happy
'If someone comes, Mei will be very happy.' (if > some, *some > if)

(13) ***Dare-ka****-ga* *ki-tara* *Mei-wa* *sugoku* *yorokobu-daroo.*
who-EX-NOM come-if Mei-TOP very happy-will
'If someone comes, Mei will be very happy.' (if > some, some > if)

2.2 Interim Analysis

The syntactic and semantic restrictions of BWIs illustrated so far, compared to CWIs, are cross-linguistically observed among the languages that have *wh*-indefinites. This has led a number of researchers of individual languages to the same conclusion that bare *wh*-words require a certain

licensor to receive an indefinite reading. Those researchers have regarded a BWI as an *e*-type variable that is bound by existential closure at VP (e.g. Cheng 1991 for Chinese, Postma 1994 for German and Dutch; cf. Heim 1982, Diesing 1992), or as an alternative set that should be bound by a certain lexical licensor such as a modal expression (e.g. Yanovich 2005 for Russian, Cheng 1991, Dong 2009 for Mandarin Chinese; cf. Hamblin 1973).[3] All of these analyses commonly assume that bare *wh*-words cannot be interpreted as an indefinite if they are not licensed properly, in which case the sentence is interpreted as either a *wh*-question or simply an ill-formed sentence.

Under this line of analysis, all the restrictions on BWIs mentioned in Section 2.1 are explained naturally. Syntactically, BWIs must be located lower than their licensor; thus they cannot move over their licensor and also cannot appear in the beginning of the sentence. Semantically, BWIs must be interpreted in scope of their licensor, thus their scope configuration should be restricted. Note that according to this analysis, some of the restrictions of BWIs should not be as strict as previously described. First, not all movements of BWIs should be illegal; movement to a position lower than the licensor should be possible. Second, a long-distance scope reading should be available as long as it is interpreted within the scope of the licensor. For instance, modal expressions such as *haoxiang* 'it seems' can license BWIs in Chinese while universal quantifiers cannot, thus a scope configuration such as [seem > some > all] is possible for the Chinese sentence in (14) with the BWI *shenme*:

(14) *Haoxiang tamen dou chiguo* ***shenme.***
seem they all ate **what**
'It seems they all ate something.'

[3] The second type of BWI licensors seem to be determined by the lexicon rather than by the semantic properties because they do not form any stable natural class, even within a single language (Yanovich 2005).

When it comes to CWIs, it would be natural to conclude that they have the same semantic representations as regular indefinites since those two kinds of indefinites pattern together. The semantics of regular indefinites that are *not* morphologically related to *wh*-words also has been a subject of controversy, especially because of their relatively free scope configurations compared to canonical quantificational expressions as illustrated in the contrast between (10) and (11). A number of researchers have attempted to explain the semantics of regular indefinites, and some relatively well-known analyses include the Choice Function Analysis (Reinhart 1997, Winter 1997, Kratzer 1998) and the Singleton Domain Analysis (Schwarzschild 2002). In the Choice Function Analysis, an indefinite introduces a choice function variable to the semantic representation of the sentence, which is existentially closed at some level (Reinhart 1997, Winter 1997) or remains free but its value is determined by the context (Kratzer 1998). In the Singleton Domain Analysis, indefinites that seem to take wider scope than other quantifiers are actually 'singleton indefinites' whose domain of quantification is contextually delimited to a singleton set.

Some previous studies on *wh*-indefinites have adopted the Choice Function Analysis (e.g. Ha 2004 for Korean, Yanovich 2005 for Russian, Yatsushiro 2009 for Japanese) for the semantic representation of CWIs, suggesting that the additional morphology after the *wh*-word in CWIs is an explicit choice function marker. The details of their analyses vary according to which specific choice function analysis was adopted. In this paper, I adopt the choice function analysis of Kratzer (1998) to analyze CWIs since it correctly predicts the relative scope configuration of negation and CWIs. According to Kratzer, a choice function indefinite necessarily takes the widest scope since it is not bound by a local existential operator but contextually determined, and an apparent narrow scope reading becomes available when the choice function is parameterized with an implicit argument against the other scope-bearing quantificational expression. For example, the Japanese

CWI *nani-ka* in the sentence (15a) indicates a choice function variable that takes the set of entities and returns one of the entities, as shown in the formula (15b). Since this function variable is free and its value is determined by the context, its default reading is the widest scope one. However, it can appear to take narrow scope if it is parameterized with an implicit argument against the other scope bearing expression 'everyone' as illustrated in the formula (15c). Since such parameterization is impossible for negation, choice function indefinites cannot be interpreted in the scope of negation. Indeed, (16) only allows a wide scope reading of the CWI.

(15) a. *Minna-ga* ***nani-ka**-o* *tabe-ta.*
everyone-NOM **what-EX-**ACC eat-DECL
'Everyone ate something.'

b. $\forall x[person(x) \wedge eat(f(thing))]$ (some > every)
c. $\forall x[person(x) \wedge eat(f(x, thing))]$ (every > some)

(16) a. *Ken-wa* ***nani-ka**-o* *tabe-nakatta.*
Ken-TOP **what-EX-**ACC eat-NEG.PAST.DECL
'Ken didn't eat something.'

b. $\neg[eat(Ken, f(thing)]$ (some > not)

3 *Wh*-indefinites in Korean

3.1 Data

While Chinese and Japanese have only one type of *wh*-indefinite (i.e., BWIs and CWIs, respectively), Korean allows both types of *wh*-indefinites, since the indefinite marker -(*i*)*nka* is optional. The puzzling fact is that in Korean, none of the restrictions on BWIs that are observed in

the case of Chinese hold, and BWIs and CWIs simply seem to pattern together. First, both BWIs and CWIs can appear in the beginning of the sentence.

(17) a. ***Nwu****ka* *wass-ta.*
who.NOM come.PAST-DECL
'Someone came.'

b. ***Nwukwu-nka****-ka* *wass-ta.*
who-EX-NOM come.PAST-DECL
'Someone came.'

Second, both BWIs and CWIs can be moved to the beginning of the sentence. In both examples shown below, the object *wh*-indefinite is scrambled over the subject.

(18) a. ***Nwukwu****-lul* *Yuna-ka* *kkok* *manna-ko sipheha-n-ta.*
who-ACC Yuna-NOM really meet-want-PRES-DECL
'Yuna really wants to see someone.'

b. ***Nwukwu-nka****-lul* *Yuna-ka* *kkok* *manna-ko sipheha-n-ta.*
who-EX-ACC Yuna-NOM really meet-want-PRES-DECL
'Yuna really wants to see someone.'

Third, both BWIs and CWIs can take wide scope. For example, the *wh*-indefinite can take scope over negation in both examples below.[4]

(19) a. *Minho-ka* ***mwe****-l* *an* *kacyewa-ss-ta.*
Minho-NOM **what-**ACC NEG bring-PAST-DECL
'Minho didn't bring something.'

[4] Ha (2004) argues that only CWIs can take wide scope over negation, other quantifiers, or *if*-clauses in Korean, providing examples that he claims illustrate the impossibility of wide-scope BWIs. However, nearly every native Korean speaker I have consulted, including myself, did accept those examples with wide-scope BWIs. Furthermore, a perception experiment in Yun (2012) shows that a wide scope reading of BWIs is even preferred over a narrow scope reading when they receive prosodic prominence.

b. *Minho-ka* ***mwe-nka****-lul* *an* *kacyewa-ss-ta.*
Minho-NOM **what-EX-**ACC NEG bring-PAST-DECL
'Minho didn't bring something.'

Fourth, both BWIs and CWIs can escape scope islands. The *wh*-indefinite can be interpreted outside of the *if*-clause in both examples below.

(20) a. ***Nwu****-ka* *o-myen* *Yuna-ka* *cham* *cohaha-l ke-ta.*
who-NOM come-if Yuna-NOM very happy-will-DECL
'If someone comes, Yuna will be very happy.'

b. ***Nwukwu-nka****-ka* *o-myen* *Yuna-ka* *cham* *cohaha-l ke-ta.*
who-EX-NOM come-if Yuna-NOM very happy-will-DECL
'If someone comes, Yuna will be very happy.'

3.2 Proposal

The above examples seem to suggest that BWIs and CWIs pattern together in Korean. Thus, one might argue that the two types of *wh*-indefinites have an identical semantic representation in Korean. Indeed, it has often been argued that Korean BWIs are merely a contracted form of the corresponding CWIs (Suh 1989, Chung 1996, Jang 1999, among others).

However, the distribution of BWIs and CWIs are not exactly the same in Korean. A BWI in fact can appear in contexts where a typical non-restricted indefinite expression or a CWI cannot appear. For instance, the BWI *nwukwu* can occur in an exceptive phrase X-*pakkey eps*- 'nobody but X' (21), as a subject of the copular verb (22), or as an answer to the question 'who are you talking about?' (23).

(21) a. *Ilen cis-ul* *hal salam-un* ***nwukwu****-pakkey* *epsta*.
such thing-ACC do person-TOP **who-**FOC not.exist
'No one but **you-know-who** would do such a thing.'

b. **Ilen cis-ul* *hal salam-un* ***nwukwu-nka****-pakkey* *epsta.*
such thing-ACC do person-TOP **who-EX-**FOC not.exist
'* No one but **someone** would do such a thing.'

(22) a. *Pemin-un* ***nwukwu****-lako* *somwun-i* *ta na-ss-ta.*
criminal-TOP **who**-be.that rumor-NOM all spread-PAST-DECL
'The rumor spread that the criminal is **you-know-who**.'

b. **Pemin-un* ***nwukwu-nka****-lako* *somwun-i* *ta na-ss-ta.*
criminal-TOP **who-EX-**be.that rumor-NOM all spread-PAST-DECL
'*The rumor spread that the criminal is **someone**.'

(23) A: *Cikum* *nwukwu* *yaykiha-nun ke-ya?*
now who talk-PROG-Q
'Who are you talking about?'

B: a. ***Nwukwu*** *isscahna.*
who you.know
'I'm talking about **you-know-who**.'
b. ****Nwukwu-nka*** *isscahna.*
who-EX you.know
'*I'm talking about **someone**, you know.'

When a BWI is used in those contexts, the speaker refers to a specific person and presupposes the listener also knows that person, but does not want to (or cannot) mention the person's name explicitly for some reason. Note that CWIs or regular non-restricted indefinites cannot be used in this way, as shown by the unacceptability of the corresponding sentences with CWIs or their English translation with a regular indefinite *someone*. Based on these observations, we can conjecture that the seemingly exceptional scope reading of Korean BWIs is possible because they

allow a referential reading.[5] Note that although referential expressions do not take scope, their interpretation is truth-conditionally compatible with the widest scope reading of indefinites. In other words, bare *wh*-words in Korean do have restrictions in their scope configuration when they bear existential quantificational force, but when they receive a referential reading, they can be seen as having an exceptionally wide scope reading. This approach is in line with the view that attributes the exceptional wide scope reading of certain genuine indefinites to their ambiguity between a quantificational reading and a referential reading (cf. Fodor & Sag 1982, Kratzer 1998).

The referential analysis of wide scope BWIs is further supported by the observation that the occurrence of BWIs is in fact not entirely free in Korean. Since a referential reading is only compatible with the widest scope reading, the analysis predicts that if a bare *wh*-word receives an indefinite-like reading in the position where typical BWIs cannot appear, it must take the widest scope. The following examples show that this prediction is borne out.

First, BWIs cannot be interpreted in the scope of other quantifiers when they escape syntactic islands. Consider the sentences in (24), in which three different readings are available in theory depending on the relative scope configuration of the *wh*-indefinite: i) the narrowest scope [many > if > **some**] (i.e. many people show an allergic reaction if they apply anything on their face; in other words, many people are simply sensitive), ii) an intermediate scope [*many > **some** > if] (i.e. many people show an allergic reaction to a certain thing if they apply it on their face: John is allergic to the chemical X, Bill is to allergic to the chemical Y, etc.), and iii) the widest scope [**some** > many > if] (i.e. there is a certain thing such that many people show an allergic

[5] A reviewer raises a question on the choice of the term "referential" instead of "specific". Although a specific expression usually receives a wide scope reading, specificity *per se* is independent of scope relations and a narrow scope specific reading is possible (Enc 1991). On the other hand, a referential reading is only compatible with the widest scope reading, which provides the adequate description of the exceptional scope behaviors of Korean BWIs as discussed in this paper.

reaction if they apply it on their face; e.g. the chemical X is a common allergen for many people). These three possible readings are all available for the CWI in (24b), but the BWI does not allow an intermediate scope reading (24a). This is because the BWI must be referential to be interpreted out of the *if*-clause, and then it should demonstrate the widest scope reading, not an intermediate one.

(24) a. *Manhun* *salamtul-i* *elkwul-ey* ***mwe**-l* *palu-myen*
many people-NOM face-LOC **what**-ACC apply-if
alleyluki-lul *ilukhinta.*
allergy-ACC occur
'Many people show allergic reaction if they apply something on face.'

b. *Manhun* *salamtul-i* *elkwul-ey* ***mwe-nka**-lul* *mek-umyen*
many people-NOM face-LOC **what-EX**-ACC eat-if
alleyluki-lul *ilukhinta.*
allergy-ACC occur
'Many people show allergic reaction if they apply something on face.'

Second, BWIs necessarily receive a wide scope reading when they are scrambled. In the previous scrambled examples, repeated below, the sentence with the BWI only has a wide scope reading that Yuna wants to see a specific person (25a), while the one with the CWI allows a narrow scope reading (25b).

(25) a. ***Nwukwu**-lul* *Yuna-ka* *kkok* *manna-ko sipheha-n-ta.*
who-ACC Yuna-NOM really meet-want-PRES-DECL
'Yuna really wants to see someone.'

b. ***Nwukwu-nka**-lul* *Yuna-ka* *kkok* *manna-ko sipheha-n-ta.*
who-EX-ACC Yuna-NOM really meet-want-PRES-DECL
'Yuna really wants to see someone.'

This observation might be difficult to disentangle from a general wide-scope preference in the scrambled position, as a wide scope reading is strongly preferred even in the sentence with a CWI in (25b). However, it becomes clearer when we consider an appropriate context that forces a narrow scope reading of an indefinite. Suppose that there is a dispute in some area and every country dispatched someone to mediate. The most natural reading is that each country dispatched different people. In such a case, BWIs cannot appear in the scrambled position (26a), while CWIs can (26b).

(26) a. ***Nwukwu**-lul* *motun* *nala-ka* *phakyenhay-ss-ta.*
who-ACC all country-NOM dispatch-PAST-DECL
'Every country dispatched someone.'

b. ***Nwukwu-nka**-lul* *motun* *nala-ka* *phakyenhay-ss-ta.*
who-EX-ACC all country-NOM dispatch-PAST-DECL
'Every country dispatched someone.'

3.3 Evidence from other languages

To summarize the proposal, BWIs in Korean are apparently exceptional, not because they are completely different from BWIs in other languages, but because they have an additional (i.e. referential) reading. A question then arises: is Korean the only language whose BWIs are ambiguous? Are there any other languages in which a non-quantificational usage of BWIs is found? As an answer to this question, this section introduces the so-called placeholder usage of bare *wh*-words.

Ganenkov et al. (2010) report that in certain Northeast Caucasian languages such as Udi and Agul, *wh*-pronouns can be used as placeholders, i.e., "hesitation markers whose use is

motivated by production difficulties on the side of the speaker." In such a case, the speaker knows that there exists a specific expression that is appropriate for the utterance but cannot recall it in the moment, so she replaces the expression with a *wh*-pronoun. The target expression can appear after the *wh*-placeholder if the speaker successfully recalls it in the end as in (27), but not necessarily, as in (28).[6]

(27) Agul (Ganenkov et al. 2010)

Na-s	*aʁ-a-a*	*zun*,
who-DAT	say-IPF-PRS	I

me	*we*	*jazna*	*q'ulban-a-s=na ...*
DEM	your:SG	brother_in_law	Qurban-O-DAT=ADD

'Then I tell [WHOM], your brother-in-law Qurban and ...'

(28) Udi (Ganenkov et al. 2010)

Bur=e=q-sa	*lül-in-aχun*	*tʼe*	***he***	*cʼoroj-e-s-a.*
begin=3SG=ST-PRS	pipe-O-ABL	DEM	**what**	flow-LV-INF-DAT

'This [WHAT] begins to flow from the pipe.'

Cheung (2015) discusses a placeholder usage of *wh*-expressions in Chinese, in which the exact reference is not uttered due to a momentary retrieval problem (29) or to avoid direct mentioning of the reference for some pragmatic reasons (30). In particular, he notices that the placeholder *wh*-words do not require any licensor, while BWIs in Chinese are known to require an appropriate licensor as we have seen earlier.[7]

[6] IPF: imperfective stem, ADD: additive particle, ST: detached part of verbal stem, O: oblique, ABL: ablative, LV: light verb, INF: infinitive

[7] The Udi and Mandarin examples introduced here involve a demonstrative, which leaves a question whether a bare *wh*-word without a demonstrative in these languages can actually serve as placeholders. Cheung (2015) reports that in Mandarin the acceptability of placeholders indeed becomes lower if they do not include a demonstrative, but does not completely rule out the placeholder use of bare *wh*-words.

(29) Cantonese (Cheung 2015)

Hoizoek ***me*** *la*!
switch.on what SP
'Switch on [WHAT]!' (what = router)

(30) Mandarin (Cheung 2015)

Na ge ***shei*** *yijing you nanyou le.*
DEM CL who already have boyfriend SP
'That [WHO] has already got a boyfriend.'

The 'placeholder usage' of *wh*-words provides evidence that the non-interrogative bare *wh*-words are not limited to the homogeneous function (i.e. existential quantification) in many languages. Note that a referential reading is naturally derived when such a *wh*-word replaces a proper noun, which suggests that Korean and Chinese may have the common source of the exceptional reading of BWIs. Finding more instances of non-canonical usage of bare *wh*-words in other languages is a worthy case for future research.

4 Conclusion

This paper has investigated the differences and similarities in the syntactic and semantic properties of *wh*-indefinites in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. The bare form of *wh*-indefinites (BWIs) in Chinese is more restricted in its use compared to the complex form of *wh*-indefinites (CWIs) in Japanese, which is in line with cross-linguistic typological generalization on BWIs and CWIs. Korean seems to make an exception to this typological generalization because its BWIs seem to behave in the same way as CWIs at first glance. However, I have shown that Korean BWIs and

CWIs are in fact systematically different and that the apparent overlaps between them is due to the possibility of a referential reading of BWIs in Korean. This is comparable with the placeholder use of *wh*-words in Chinese, which allows a broader range of non-interrogative readings of bare *wh*-words in Chinese.

References

Aldridge, E. (2007). *Wh*-indefinites and their relation to *wh*-in-situ. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society*, 43, 139-153.

Aoun, J., & Li, A. (1993). On some differences between Chinese and Japanese *wh*-elements. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 20, 265-272.

Bruening, B. (2007). *Wh*-in-situ does not correlate with *wh*-indefinites or question particles. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 38, 139-66.

Chang, S.-J. (1973). A generative study of discourse: pragmatic aspects of Korean with reference to English. *Ehak yenkwu* [Language Research] 9.2 (supplement).

Cheng, L. L.-S. C. (1991). *On the Typology of Wh-Questions*. PhD dissertation. MIT.

Cheung, L. Y-L. (2015). Uttering the unutterable with *wh*-placeholders. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 24, 271-308.

Chung, D.-H. (1996). *On the representation and licensing of Q and Q-dependency*. PhD Dissertation. University of Southern California.

Diesing, M. (1992). *Indefinites*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Dong, H. (2009). *Issues in the semantics of Mandarin questions*. PhD Dissertation. Cornell University.

Enç, M. (1991). The semantics of specificity. *Linguistic inquiry*, 22, 1-25.

Fodor, J. D., & Sag, I. A. (1982). Referential and quantificational indefinites. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 5, 355-98.

Ganenkov, D., Lander, Y., & Maisak, T. (2010). From interrogatives to placeholders in Udi and Agul spontaneous narratives. in N. Amiridze, B. Davis, M. Maclagan, H. Kitano (eds) *Fillers in Discourse and Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Ha, S. (2004). The existential reading of *wh*-words and their scope relations. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society,* 40, 83-95.

Haspelmath, M. (1997). *Indefinite Pronouns*: Oxford University Press.

Heim, I. (1982). *The Semantics of Definite and Indefinite Noun Phrases*. PhD Dissertation. University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Huang, C.-T. J. (1982). *Logical relations in Chinese and the theory of grammar*: PhD Dissertation. MIT.

Jang, Y. (1999). Two types of question and existential quantification. *Linguistics,* 37, 847-69.

Kim, A.-R. (2000). *A Derivational Quantification of "Wh-Phrase"*. PhD Dissertation. Indiana University.

Kinuhata, T., & Whitman, J. (2011). Genesis of indefinite pronouns in Japanese and Korean. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics,* 18, 88-100: CSLI Stanford.

Kratzer, A. (1998). Scope or pseudoscope? Are there wide-scope indefinites? *Events and grammar*, 163-96: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Kuroda, S.-Y. (1965). *Generative grammatical studies in the Japanese language*. PhD Dissertation. MIT.

Li, Y.-H. A. (1992). Indefinite *Wh* in Mandarin Chinese. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics,* 1, 125-155.

Lin, J.-W. (1998). On existential polarity *wh*-phrases in Chinese. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics,* 7, 219-55.

Postma, G. (1994). The indefinite reading of WH. *Linguistics in the Netherlands* 1994, 187-98.

Ramsey, R. (1987). *The languages of China*. Princeton University Press.

Reinhart, T. (1997). Quantifier scope: how labor is divided between QR and choice functions. *Linguistics and Philosophy,* 20, 335-97.

Ross, J. R. (1967). *Constraints on variables in syntax*. PhD Dissertation. MIT.

Shimoyama, J. (2006). Indeterminate phrase quantification in Japanese. *Natural Language Semantics*, 14, 139-73.

Schwarzschild, R. (2002). Singleton Indefinites. *Journal of Semantics,* 19, 289-314.

Suh, C.-S. (1989). Interrogatives and indefinite words in Korean: with reference to Japanese. *Harvard Studies in Korean Linguistics,* 3, 329-40.

Tsai, W.-T. D. (1994). *On Economizing the Theory of A-bar Dependencies*. Ph.D. Dissertation, MIT.

Watanabe, A. (1992). *Wh*-in-situ, subjacency and chain formation. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics II*. MIT.

Winter, Y. (1997). Choice functions and the scopal semantics of indefinites. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 20, 399-467.

Yanovich, I. (2005). Choice-functional series of indefinites and Hamblin semantics. Paper presented at the *SALT XV*, Ithaca, NY.

Yatsushiro, K. (2009). The distribution of quantificational suffixes in Japanese. *Natural Language Semantics*, 17, 141-73.

Yi, S.-W. (2000). On the indefinite expression of "interrogative pronoun+(*i*)+-*nka*" [in Korean]. *Hankwukehak* [Korean Linguistics], 36, 191-219.

Yoon, J.-M. (2005). Two historical changes in *wh*-constructions in Korean and their implications. *Studies in Generative Grammar*, 15, 457-87.

Yun, J. (2012). The deterministic prosody of indeterminates. *Proceedings of the 29th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, 285-93.