

Wh-Questions in the English Language

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes wh-questions in the English Language based mainly on Chomsky's Minimalist Programme of transformational grammar as the theoretical model. The four main objectives of this paper are as follows: first, it undertakes a cross linguistic typological analysis of wh-questions and it then discusses the derivation of wh-interrogatives in English. The discussion on the derivation of wh-questions focuses on Head-to-Head movement and operator movement as the two transformations used to derive wh-interrogatives in the language. Second, the paper evaluates the pied-piping of bi-lexical and multi-lexical wh-phrases in English. Third, the derivation of direct and indirect wh-questions in embedded clauses are also discussed. Finally, the constraints on wh-movement are identified and analyzed with copious examples.

1. INTRODUCTION

Derivation of negation and question formation from kernel sentences are two examples of linguistic universals; what is more, they are core aspects of syntactic analysis. In natural languages, questions are bifurcated into yes/no and *wh*-types. This paper is an analysis of *wh*-question formation in English based on the Minimalist Program, as well as elements from Principles and Parameters model of Chomsky's transformational grammar – which is adopted as the theoretical model for this study. As an ex-colony of Great Britain, English is Nigeria's official language. It is also the language of upward socio-economic movement in the country. Succinctly put, English is a high status language in Nigeria.

This essay identifies the words that function as *wh*-items in the language and it also discusses the derivation of *wh*-interrogative in the language. The paper deliberates on *wh*-question in direct and embedded clauses in English. It analyzes the syntactic process of pied piping of