# THE TENSE CARRIER IN TWO KINDS OF WH-SENTENCES

## by Yao Shen

The significance of the positional relation of the tense carrier to the subject of the sentence in the formation of simple affirmative sentences, simple negative sentences, and tag-questions has been demonstrated in two previous articles *(TESL Reporter*, Vol. 7, No. 1 and No. 2). This same relation is significant in still another group of sentences which are the wh-sentences. Each of these sentences begins with a wh- word. The two kinds of wh-sentences under study are the wh- questions and the wh- statements. In each case, the

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wh- word occurs in the predicate of the sentence; and because of that, the wh- words included are: *what, who(m), whose, which, where, when, why,* and *how; who,* which occurs as the subject of the sentence is excluded. Examples used are affirmative sentences.

A wh- question is formed in two steps. The first one is the formation of a simple yes-no question distinctive by the tense carrier (T) occurring before the subject (S) of the sentence, T+S.

|    | T + | S |  |
|----|------|------|------------------|
| a. | Is | John | studying? |
| b. | Was | Mary | leaving? |
| c. | Has | Paul | been teaching? |
| d. | Is | Alice | reading? |
| e. | Can | Joe | find the answer? |
| f. | Will | Mark | tell you? |
| g. | Would | Bob | have to know? |
| h. | Was | Pat | informed? |

The second step is the occurrence of a wh- word before the yes-no question, Wh-+T+S.

|    | Wh- + | T + | S |  |
|----|-------|------|------|------------------|
| a. | What | is | John | studying? |
| b. | Who(m) | was | Mary | leaving? |
| c. | Whose(class) | has | Paul | been teaching? |
| d. | Which(book) | is | Alice | reading? |
| e. | Where | can | Joe | find the answer? |
| f. | When | will | Mark | tell you? |
| g. | Why | would | Bob | have to know? |
| h. | How | was | Pat | informed? |

A wh- statement is also formed in two steps. The first one is the formation of a simple statement distinctive by the tense carrier occuring after the subject of the sentence, S+T.

|    | S + | T |  |
|----|------|------|------------------|
| a. | John | is | studying. |
| b. | Mary | was | leaving. |
| c. | Paul | has | been teaching. |
| d. | Alice | is | reading. |
| e. | Joe | can | find the answer. |
| f. | Mark | will | tell you. |
| g. | Bob | would | have to know. |
| h. | Pat | was | informed. |

The second step is the occurrence of a wh- word before the statement, Wh-+S+T.

| Wh- + | T + | S |  |
|-------|------|------|------------------|
| When | will | they | know something? |

|    | Wh- + | S + | T |  |
|----|-------|------|------|------------------|
| a. | What | John | is | studying |
| b. | Who(m) | Mary | was | leaving |
| c. | Whose(class) | Paul | has | been teaching |
| d. | Which(book) | Alice | is | reading |
| e. | Where | Joe | can | find the answer |
| f. | When | Mark | will | tell you |
| g. | Why | Bob | would | have to know |
| h. | How | Pat | was | informed |

The two kinds of wh- sentences differ from each other in two ways. First, they are distinctive according to the position of the tense carrier, that is, whether it precedes or follows the subject of the sentence.

# TENSE CARRIER IN WH- SENTENCES

*(continued from page 3)*

Second, a wh- statement normally occurs as a constituent sentence embedded in a matrix sentence that may be either a statement or a question. In the following two examples, each matrix sentence in which the wh- statements are embedded is a statement, S + T. In the first example, the wh- statements are the subject of the matrix sentence, in the second, the object.

Example 1.

| | S | | + T | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Something | | would be recorded. | |
| | Wh- | + S | + T | |
| a. | What | John | is | studying |
| b. | Who(m) | Mary | was | leaving |
| c. | Whose (class) | Paul | has | been teaching |
| d. | Which (book) | Alice | is | reading |
| e. | Where | Joe | can | find the answer |
| f. | When | Mark | will | tell you |
| g. | Why | Bob | would | have to know |
| h. | How | Pat | was | informed |

Example 2.

| | S | | + T | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | They | | will know something. | |
| | Wh- | + S | + T | |
| a. | What | John | is | studying |
| b. | Who(m) | Mary | was | leaving |
| c. | Whose (class) | Paul | has | been teaching |
| d. | Which (book) | Alice | is | reading |
| e. | Where | Joe | can | find the answer |
| f. | When | Mark | will | tell you |
| g. | Why | Bob | would | have to know |
| h. | How | Pat | was | informed |

A wh- statement may be embedded in a matrix sentence that is either a simple yes-no question or a wh- question. In the following two examples the wh- statements are embedded in yes-no questions, T + S.

Example 1.

| | T | | + S | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Would | | something be recorded? | |
| | Wh- | + S | + T | |
| a. | What | John | is | studying |
| b. | Who(m) | Mary | was | leaving |
| c. | Whose (class) | Paul | has | been teaching |
| d. | Which (book) | Alice | is | reading |
| e. | Where | Joe | can | find the answer |
| f. | When | Mark | will | tell you |
| g. | Why | Bob | would | have to know |
| h. | How | Pat | was | informed |

Example 2.

| | T | | + S | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Will | | they know something? | |
| | Wh- | + S | + T | |
| a. | What | John | is | studying |
| b. | Who(m) | Mary | was | leaving |
| c. | Whose (class) | Paul | has | been teaching |
| d. | Which (book) | Alice | is | reading |
| e. | Where | Joe | can | find the answer |
| f. | When | Mark | will | tell you |
| g. | Why | Bob | would | have to know |
| h. | How | Pat | was | informed |

In the following two examples the wh- statement are embedded in wh- questions, Wh + T + S.

Example 1.

| | Wh- | + T | + S | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Why | would | something be recorded? | |
| | Wh- | + S | + T | |
| a. | What | John | is | studying |
| b. | Who(m) | Mary | was | leaving |
| c. | Whose (class) | Paul | has | been teaching |
| d. | Which (book) | Alice | is | reading |
| e. | Where | Joe | can | find the answer |
| f. | When | Mark | will | tell you |
| g. | Why | Bob | would | have to know |
| h. | How | Pat | was | informed |

Example 2.

| | Wh- | + T | + S | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | When | will | they know something? | |
| | Wh- | + S | + T | |
| a. | What | John | is | studying |
| b. | Who(m) | Mary | was | leaving |
| c. | Whose (class) | Paul | has | been teaching |
| d. | Which (book) | Alice | is | reading |
| e. | Where | Joe | can | find the answer |
| f. | When | Mark | will | tell you |
| g. | Why | Bob | would | have to know |
| h. | How | Pat | was | informed |

Only affirmative wh- sentences are used here; negative ones are not. The reason is that the positional relation of the tense carrier and the subject of the sentence that distinguishes an affirmative wh- question and an affirmative wh- statement is the same as that which distinguishes a simple affirmative (yes-no) question and a simple

affirmative statement; the difference between each set of sentences is the presence and absence of the initial wh- word. This is similar to saying that a wh- sentence is one that begins with a wh- word. In the case of an affirmative wh- question, a wh- word precedes a simple affirmative question; in the case of an affirmative wh- statement, a wh- word precedes a simple affirmative statement.

**Without wh-**

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | T + S |
| Statement | S + T |

**With wh-**

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | Wh- + T + S |
| Statement | Wh- + S + T |

In the formation of a simple negative sentence, question or statement, the syntactic relation of the negative indicator, *not* or *n't*, is with the tense carrier. Neither *not* nor *n't* precedes the tense carrier; it follows it, though not always successively. The formation of a simple negative sentence, question or statement, is the same as that of a simple affirmative one; the difference between each set of sentences is the presence or absence of the negative indicator, neg.

*Affirmative*

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | T + neg + S |
| Statement | S + T |

*Negative*

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | neg + T + S |
| Statement | S + T + neg |

In the case of a negative wh- question, a wh- word precedes a simple negative (yes-no) question; in the case of a negative wh- statement, a wh- word precedes a simple negative statement.

**Without wh-**

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | T + neg + S |
| Statement | S + T + neg |

**With wh-**

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | Wh- + T + neg + S |
| Statement | Wh- + S + T + neg |

A negative wh- sentence, question or statement, can also be said to be formed the same way as an affirmative wh- one is; the difference between each set of sentences is the presence and absence of the negative indicator.

*Affirmative:*

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | Wh- + T + S |
| Statement | Wh- + S + T |

*Negative*

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | Wh- + T + neg + S |
| Statement | Wh- + S + T + neg |

The following summarizes the formation of wh- sentences, question or statement, affirmative or negative. Each wh- sentence finds its base in an affirmative sentence without wh-.

**Without wh-**

*Affirmative:*

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | T + S |
| Statement | S + T |

*Negative*

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | T + neg + S |
| Statement | S + T + neg |

**With wh-**

*Affirmative*

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | Wh- + T + S |
| Statement | Wh + S + T |

*Negative*

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | Wh- + T + neg + S |
| Statement | Wh- + S + T + neg |

Regardless of whether a wh- sentence is affirmative or negative, the feature that distinguishes the two kinds of wh- sentences with the wh- word in the predicate (and that is also our focus of attention in this article) is the positional relation of the tense carrier and the subject of the sentence.

It is that in a wh- question the tense carrier precedes the subject; in a wh- statement the tense carrier follows the subject.

Wh- + T + S = question
Wh- + S + T = statement

And this is the same relation that distinguishes simple affirmative sentences, simple negative sentences, and tag-questions.

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