

What you see is what you get: A few arguments for isomorphic sluicing in ASL

Recent literature has seen resurgence of interest in sluicing constructions (Ross 1969, Merchant 2001)– on interpretive grounds, their syntax is once again being questioned (Barros 2012, 2014; Merchant & Simpson 2012). Here, we contribute to the discussion by examining relevant structures in American Sign Language (ASL), (1), which have been used as convenient diagnostics for other structures (Author1 2012, Gokgoz 2012) but not examined carefully in their own right. One of the goals here is to fill in this gap in the literature. The other is to demonstrate that (1) involves actual sluicing.

- 
- (1) a. TRUE-BIZ SOMEONE PAY FOOD <sup>br</sup>WHO/WHY NOT-KNOW.  
 Lit. *Really someone paid for food who/why I don't know*
- b. TRUE-BIZ SOMEONE PAY FOOD NOT-KNOW WHO/WHY <sup>br</sup>  
 Lit. *Really someone paid for food but I don't know who/why*
- 

Two observations can be made about (1): both arguments and adjuncts serve as remnants, and at least on the surface (1a) does not resemble the traditional sluicing construction (with the remnant having moved above the predicate), opening a number of other options for analysis. Spurred by the literature, and armed with previous research on wh-movement and TP-ellipsis in ASL (Lillo- Martin & Petronio 1997, Nunes & Quadros 2005), we examine cases like (1) and offer an Occam's Razor argument that ASL (1) involves typical Ross-Merchant style sluicing (move+elide), which places ASL in the class of languages where the E-site is isomorphic with the antecedent and the remnant is further dislocated for independent reasons. We argue against alternatives: (A) various copular constructions, (B) a 'stand-alone' matrix question, and (C) stripping.

**A. Not a copular construction:**

i. If, instead of a sluice, (1) contained a cleft pronoun, as the English translation of (2) suggests, then the sluice portion as a sentence would be expected to be possible out of the blue – cleft pronouns are 'deep-anaphoric' (Gribanova 2013).

- 
- (2) *Showing someone a mysterious object*
- a. Nima-lig-i-ni bil-ma-y-man.  
 what-comp-3sg.poss-acc know-neg-prs-1sg  
 'I don't know what (that is).' [Uzbek] (Gribanova 2013)
- b. i. \* (iIX) NOT-KNOW WHAT [ASL]  
 ii. \* WHAT (iIX) NOT-KNOW
- 

ii. One other option for the sluice-like construction in (1) is a pseudo-cleft (Wilbur 2005, 2013) or Question Answer Construction (QAC, Caponigro & Davidson (C&D) 2011). However, a QAC/pseudo-cleft is a declarative. One argument for this comes from (3) in C&D (2011) – embedding of QAC under ASK/WONDER is impossible. The other argument comes from (4): multiple remnants are impossible with QAC. Finally, QACs are allowed with non-referential items (5). The opposite is true with a sluice.

- 
- (3) a. THOSE GIRLS HOPE /\*ASK [<sup>br</sup>THEIR FATHER BUY WHAT, CAR].  
 'Those girls hoped/ asked that what their father bought was a car.' = QAC (C&D 2011 [42])
- b. MARY KNOW SOMEONE PAY FOOD iIX {WONDER / \*HOPE / KNOW} WHO. = sluicing  
 'Mary knows someone paid for food; I {wonder / \*hope / know} who.'
- (4) a. \*GIRLS HOPE FATHER BUY WHAT WHERE CAR DEALERSHIP = QAC (adp C&D 2011)  
 'The girls hoped their father would buy them a car at a dealership'
- b. JOHN OUT WHERE disj-shift WHY iIX NOT-KNOW = sluicing
- (5) a. JOHN GO WHERE, (HE GO) EVERYWHERE. 'John went everywhere.' = QAC (C&D 2011)
- b. \*JOHN OUT disj-shift NOT-KNOW EVERYWHERE = sluicing  
 '\*John went out but I don't know everywhere'
- 

**B. Not a stand-alone sentence (a matrix wh-question) → an embedded interrogative.**

When it looks like sluicing in ASL but who knows if it is

i. Non-manual marking associated with matrix wh-questions is furrowed eye-brows ( —<sup>bf</sup>, (6)). With sluicing, —<sup>bf</sup> is disallowed and brows are raised instead (7a), as observed in embedded QACs (3).

ii. Wh-questions in ASL can be doubled; this doubling is a matrix phenomenon (6) and is also disallowed with sluicing (7b).

- 
- (6) a. <sup>bf/\*br</sup> **WHAT** JOHN BUY YESTERDAY **WHAT**      ‘What did John buy yesterday?’  
 (7) a. JOHN BUY SOMETHING <sub>{\*bf/br}</sub> **IX** NOT-KNOW **WHAT**      ‘John bought something but I don’t know what’  
 b. \***WHAT** JOHN BUY SOMETHING **IX** (**WHAT**) **DON’T-KNOW** **WHAT**
- 

iii. We introduce a novel diagnostic for embedded interrogatives: PALM-UP – an indefiniteness marker (Conlin et al. 2003)- and WIGGLE, both of which occur at the end of interrogatives (9). However, only PALM-UP is found in embedded cases (9b) and only with interrogatives (8).

- 
- (8) a. JOHN EAT **WHAT**, PASTA \*PALM-UP.      → QAC  
       ‘What John ate was pasta.’      (adp. C&D 2011 [12])  
 b. LEAVE MY SHOES WHERE, KITCHEN \*PALM-UP.  
       ‘The place where I left my shoes was the kitchen.’      (adp. Wilbur 1994 [4])
- (9) a. <sub>{bf/\*br}</sub> SOMEONE PAID FOOD NOT-KNOW WHO **WIGGLE**.      → matrix interrog.  
       *approx.* ‘Do you know who this person is that paid for food because I don’t?’  
 b. <sub>{bf/\*br}</sub> SOMEONE PAID FOOD NOT-KNOW WHO **PALM-UP**      → embed. interrog.  
       Someone paid for food but I don’t know who’
- 

### C. Not a case of sluice stripping/embedded stripping.

Stripping targets a non-constituent (Hankammer 1979) (10a). ASL allows argument drop in every position robustly (Lillo-Martin 1989, Bahan 2002, Author 1 2017) and therefore (1) could masquerade as stripping. This, however, is doubtful for two reasons.

i. ASL arguments are allowed to remain overt, and the ASL parallel of (10a) impossible (10b).

- 
- (10)a. Lou will ask Doris about syntax, but I can’t imagine who<sub>Lou will ask</sub> about phonology. (Nevins 2008)  
 b. CAN ASK<sub>i</sub> (ABOUT) SYNTAX BUT NOT-KNOW WHO { \*~~CAN ASK~~/<sub>ok</sub>CAN ASK } (ABOUT) PHONOLOGY  
       ‘You can ask me about syntax but I don’t know who you can ask about phonology’
- 

ii. Given the data in **A.-B.**, this would be the case of embedded stripping. Wurmbrand (2017) shows that embedded stripping targets not a CP but, rather, FocP below.

---

(11)First, they thought it would be done last year, then they thought (\*that) THIS year. (Wurmbrand 2017)

---

However, we have shown the construction of interest is an embedded interrogative – wh movement to SpecForceP, i.e. CP on typical accounts (Rizzi 1997, Haegemann 2000a, a.o).

We have not argued for the wh-movement + TP-ellipsis in (1) explicitly, having assumed independent existence of both wh-movement (Lillo-Martin & Petronio 1997, i.a.) and TP ellipsis (Nunes & Quadros 2005). Instead, we take **A.-C.** above as an Occam’s Razor argument that (1) is better analyzed as a case of the sluicing (move+elide). This view leaves the difference between (1a-b) as an additional movement when required, evidenced by the obligatoriness of non-manuals on (1a) but not in (1b). The view is compatible with focused XP at sentence periphery proposed elsewhere (Wilbur 1994, 1995, 2013).

#### Selected References:

- [1]Barros, M. 2014. Sluicing and Identity in Ellipsis. PhD. Dissertation, Rutgers University. [2]Caponigro, I., & Davidson, K. 2011. Ask, and tell as well: Question-Answer Clauses in American Sign Language. *Natural Language Semantics*, 19 (4), 323-371. Gokgoz, K. 2013. *The Nature of Object Marking in American Sign Language*. PhD. Dissertation. Purdue University. [3] Merchant, J. 2001. *The syntax of silence: Sluicing, islands, and the theory of ellipsis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [4] Ross, J. 1969. Guess who? In *Proceedings of CLS*, eds. R. Binnick, A. Davison, G. Green, and J. Morgan, 252-286. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society. [5]Sandler, W., & Lillo-Martin, D. 2006. *Sign Language and Linguistic Universals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [6] Wurmbrand, S. 2017. Stripping and topless complements. *Linguistic Inquiry*.