

What do I know?!

Reflections on a rhetorical question

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ABSTRACT

The English rhetorical question *what do I know?!*, with emphasis on *I*, looks at first blush like a garden-variety *wh*-question in terms of its syntax, apparently featuring *what* as the direct object of *know*. What may enhance this impression is that Dutch *weet ik veel?!* ‘know I much/a lot’, which has the same rhetorical function, appears to have the quantifier *veel* as the verb’s object *in situ*. But the Hungarian equivalent of these rhetorical questions, *mit tudom én?!* ‘what.ACC know.1SG.DEF I’, suggests clearly that *mit* ‘what’, despite its accusative case, is not the verb’s direct object. Regular *wh*-objects in Hungarian trigger indefinite agreement on the finite verb. Indefinite *tudok* is grammatical but the result can only be interpreted as a genuine, non-rhetorical self-addressed question; in its rhetorical use, we find definite agreement (*tudom*). In this short paper, I will subject this rhetorical question type to an exploratory examination aimed at showing that, rather than being an argument of the verb, the *wh*-expression/quantifier can serve an adverbial function in the verb’s projection.

1 *What is not the object*

English (1) is formally a question, but it is typically used in contexts in which it does not invite an answer: while (1) could of course be used as a self-addressed question in a *monologue intérieur*, when it is used in a conversational context it usually does not serve as a request for information but rather as an emphatic affirmation of the fact that the speaker has no clue about the matter brought up by his or her interlocutor.

(1) what do I know?!

Thus, (1), especially with a heavy pitch accent on *I*, is usually a rhetorical question — one that, on its face, looks just like a regular *wh*-question in the syntax, with *what* apparently serving as the *wh*-object of *know*, raised into the left periphery as in regular *wh*-questions.

But if *what* in (1) had to be mapped into the verb’s direct object position, one would be hard pressed to deal with the fact that the verb *know* can actually select an interrogative clause as its object in this type of rhetorical question, as in (2).¹

1 (2) reproduces a number of tokens found on the internet through a search for the string “what do I know whether”. Whether interrogative complement clauses introduced by other *wh*-items are possible as well is something I have not systematically investigated. It may be significant that for the string “what do I know if” there are very few (if any) clear hits involving the rhetorical use of *what do I know*. If indeed *if* cannot replace *whether* in examples of the type in (2), this may be revealing regarding the structural position of the subordinate clause: in particular, thinking of the fact that *whether* does not alternate with *if* in subject questions (*whether/*if he will win is unclear*), we may want to treat the subordinate clauses in (2) as a specifier of some projection of the verb. But whether it be a complement or a specifier, the interrogative clause in (2) is definitely an argument of *know*. Given that *know* assigns at most one internal θ -role, this entails that *what* cannot be treated as an argument of the verb.

- (2)
- a. what do I know whether china be dear or no? (Jonathan Swift)
 - b. what do I know whether, in these kinds of government, the devil hath set any tripping-block before me where I may stumble and fall, and dash out my teeth?
(Thomas Shelton's translation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*)
 - c. what do I know whether this be a sin indeed, as it seems to be?
(English translation of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*)
 - d. what do I know whether he was saying something?
(transcript of interpreter's translation of witness' statement at Yugoslavia Tribunal;
full text available at: <http://www.un.org/icty/transe25/010328ed.htm>)
 - e. what do I know whether Mr Spock was a doctor or not
(<http://wc0.worldcrossing.com/WebX?14@@.1de3412f/5>; March 2007)
 - f. what do I know whether or not an amateur's blog is reliable or not?
(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Attribution/Archive_6)

Apparently, the presence of *what* does not block the merger of an object clause, which must mean (given that *know* is a monotransitive verb) that *what* in (2) is not itself the verb's direct object.

The Dutch equivalents of English (1), illustrated in (3), do not feature a *wh*-operator. They do have the syntax of a question, however — of an apparent yes/no-question this time, with its characteristic verb-initial order.

- (3)
- a. weet ik veel?!
know I much
 - b. weet ik 't (allemaal)?!
know I it all
 - c. weet ik dat?!
know I that
all: 'what do I know?!

Even more so than in the case of English (1), the constructions in (3) give the impression that the verb takes the quantificational, pronominal or demonstrative element as its object, thanks to the fact that *veel* 'much', *'t* 'it' and *dat* 'that' occur clause-internally (unlike *what* in (1)). But as in the case of (1), it is possible in Dutch (3a,b) to add an interrogative clause to *weten* 'know', as illustrated in (4a,b).² This again suggests that in (4a,b), *veel* 'much' and *'t* 'it' are not the verb's object.

2 There is also a past-tense variant of (4a) (though not of (4b)), with a declarative clause as the object: (i). To this, English has a close counterpart in the form of (ii).

- (i)
- a. wist {ik/jij/hij/zij} veel dat er iets vreselijks stond te gebeuren?!
knew I/you(SG)/he/she much that there something terrible stood to happen
 - b. wisten {wij/jullie/zij} veel dat er iets vreselijks stond te gebeuren?!
knew we/you(PL)/they much that there something terrible stood to happen
'how could {I/you/(s)he/we/they} have known that something terrible was about to happen?'
- (ii) little did {I, you, (s)he, we, they} know that something terrible was about to happen

English (ii) is interesting for the fact that downward-entailing *little* licenses an NPI in the embedded clause:

- (iii) little did {I, you, (s)he, we, they} know that anything terrible was about to happen

The grammaticality of (iii) also confirms that the *that*-clause is an argument of the verb: it is impossible for *little* to license a polarity-sensitive element in an adverbial clause (*little did we know [when {someone! *anyone} told us about it] that ...*).

- (4)
- a. weet ik veel wat hij uitgespookt heeft?!
know I much what he out-ghosted has
 - b. weet ik 't (allemaal) wat hij uitgespookt heeft?!
know I it all what he out-ghosted has
'what do I know/heaven knows what he's been up to'
 - c. *weet ik dat wat hij uitgespookt heeft?!
know I that what he out-ghosted has

The hypothesis that *veel* and *'t* are being used non-argumentally in (4a,b) also holds the key to an explanation for the ungrammaticality of (4c), with demonstrative *dat* 'that': if the particular non-argumental use of *veel* and *'t* in (4a,b) is one that *dat* does not support, *dat* can only be mapped into the object position of the verb, precluding the addition of an interrogative clause.³ I will return to this in section 4.

That the pronoun/quantifier is not the object of the verb is suggested particularly strongly by the agreement facts of Hungarian rhetorical questions of the type in (1). Consider the examples in (5), where (5a) is a non-rhetorical self-addressed question and (5b) is the Hungarian equivalent of English (1).

- (5)
- a. mit tudok én?
what-ACC know-1SG.PRES.INDEF I
'what do I know?' (non-rhetorical, self-addressed question)
 - b. mit tudom én?!
what-ACC know-1SG.PRES.DEF I
'what do I know?' (rhetorical question: 'I haven't a clue')

Hungarian has two forms of finite transitive verbs, an INDEFINITE (or 'subjective') and a DEFINITE (or 'objective') form. The distribution of these forms in simple transitive clauses is a function of the definiteness specification of the object. The fact that the verb is inflected for INDEF agreement in (5a) is entirely unsurprising: *mit* is the verb's object, and it is indefinite. But the definite inflection in (5b) tells us that *mit* should not be treated as the object of *tud* 'know' in (5b), for otherwise DEF agreement would be entirely mysterious.

The mystery of the source of definiteness inflection in (5b) will be solved once we find something that could control DEF agreement. In (6b), where *mit* co-occurs with a complement clause, we have something that can plausibly be held responsible for DEF agreement on the verb: the finite complement clause, which we know can trigger DEF agreement. If the accusative case-marked indefinite *wh*-pronoun *mit* were the object of the verb and checked structural accusative Case against it, the presence of DEF agreement in (6b) would be entirely unexpected. Note that it is in fact possible for *mit* to trigger indefinite agreement on the matrix verb even in the presence of a finite complement clause, as in the *wh*-scope marking construction in (6a), where *mit*₁ marks the scope of *mit*₂, which is itself stuck in the embedded clause. But when upstairs *mit*₁ controls agreement in the matrix clause, we lose the rhetorical 'I haven't a clue' reading — (6a) has the semantics of a self-addressed long-distance *wh*-question, with thematic *mit*₂ scoping over the matrix verb. This reading is entirely different from that of rhetorical (6b), where *mit*₂ scopes under the matrix verb. Concomitantly, the syntax of (6b) must be different from that of (6a). In (6a), upstairs *mit*₁ checks Case against *tudok* and controls agreement with it, as a proleptic object — a 'herald' of the embedded clause. But in (6b), rather than *mit*₁, it is the embedded clause itself that serves as the object, controlling DEF agreement.

³ The demonstrative *dat* has an established non-argumental use as a pro-predicate: *Jan is slim en Marie is dat ook* 'Jan is smart and Marie is that too'. If the non-argumental use of the (*wh*-)pronominal or quantificational element in our rhetorical constructions were a predicative one, therefore, we would not have an account for the ill-formedness of (4c). In section 2, I will argue that the particular non-argumental use of the (*wh*-)pronoun or quantifier in the rhetorical constructions under discussion is an *adverbial* one. The fact that *dat* is never used as an adverbial modifier then makes (4c) fall into place.

- (6) a. mit₁ tudok₁ én hogy mit₂ nem tudok?
 what-ACC know-1SG.PRES.INDEF I that what-ACC not know-1SG.PRES.INDEF
 ‘what do I know that I don’t know?’ (non-rhetorical, self-addressed question)
- b. mit₁ tudom₁ én hogy mit₂ nem tudok?!
 what-ACC know-1SG.PRES.DEF I that what-ACC not know-1SG.PRES.INDEF
 ‘what/how do I know what I don’t know?!’ (rhetorical question: ‘I haven’t a clue’)

For (6b), we now have a goal for the verb’s definiteness feature: the object clause. But what could be the controller of DEF agreement in (5b), where there seems to be nothing besides *mit* that could take care of this? A familiar strategy in generative syntax is to address this kind of puzzle with the aid of an abstraction: we postulate a silent definite object — a *pro*. This will allow us to get the morphosyntax of (5b) to come out right: *tudom* requires a definite object; *mit* cannot be that object; but *pro* will serve the purpose perfectly. Of course the postulation of a silent definite object will only deliver an explanatorily adequate perspective on (5b) if there is some independent way in which we can support it. Interestingly, it turns out that this theoretical postulate is not a complete phantom: it is in fact possible to have an overt *azt* in the complement of the verb in rhetorical questions of the type in (5b), as in (7).

- (7) mit tudom én azt?!
 what-ACC know-1SG.PRES.DEF I it/that-ACC
 ‘how should I know that?!’

The grammaticality of (7) is perhaps the clearest indication one might desire that *mit* in (5b) is not an argument of the verb: *azt* is evidently the object of *tudom*, so *mit* must be something else. In English or Dutch, it is impossible to add some pronominal or demonstrative element to rhetorical questions like (1) or (3). But for (1) and (3a,b) as well, we have been led to believe that the (*wh*-)pronoun or quantifier does not (always) serve as an argument of the verb. This said, now of course the question that becomes urgent is what the (*wh*-)pronoun or quantifier could be. I will turn to this next.

2 If *what* is not the object, then *what*?!?

Though it is impossible in English (1) and Dutch (3) to add some additional nominal element, there are constructions similar to (1) and (3) in which English and Dutch can mimic Hungarian (7) closely. Consider the rhetorical questions in (8), for all three languages under investigation. The Hungarian example is once again the most transparent one, featuring both *mit* ‘what’ and the experiencer, *engem*, in the accusative.

- (8) a. what do I care that/if/whether S?!
 b. wat kan het mij schelen dat/of S?!
 what can it me concern that/if S
 c. mit érdekel az engem hogy/ha S?!
 what.ACC interest.3SG.PRES.INDEF it(NOM) me.ACC that/if S

This ‘double accusative’ pattern reminds one of constructions of the type in (9c), in which a ‘regular’ accusative object, *újságot* ‘newspaper’, and an accusative-marked adverbial modifier, *többet* ‘more’, co-occur in a single clause headed by a monotransitive verb.⁴

4 Csirmaz (2006:187) rejects (i); this is more a matter of lexical choice and linear order (‘*János sokat olvas könyvet* ‘János much.ACC reads book.ACC’) than compatibility of accusative modifiers and objects *per se*. (ii) is an attested example of the type in (9c). The accusative adjective in (9c) passes the extraction test applied in Den Dikken (to appear, Chapter 3): (iii) is grammatical, albeit somewhat marked. (Thanks to Éva Dékány for her help with these examples.) The grammaticality of (iii) indicates, in light of the analysis developed in Den Dikken (to appear), that the adverbial modifier headed by *többet* checks structural accusative Case against *v*.

- (9)
- a. János újságot olvas
János newspaper.ACC reads
'János reads a newspaper'
 - b. János többet olvas, mint én
János more.ACC reads than I
'János reads more than I do'
 - c. János többet olvas újságot, mint én
János more.ACC reads newspaper.ACC than I
'János reads the newspaper more than me'

For constructions of the type in (9b), Csirmaz (2006) argues explicitly and in admirable detail that the accusative adverbial *többet* has structural accusative Case. The fact that such accusative adverbials tolerate an accusative-marked direct object by their side, as in (9c), indicates that the purveyor of the structural accusative Case feature ('little *v*' in current parlance) is capable in principle of having its Case feature engage in one-to-many relations. This is theoretically very interesting — but I will set the theoretical questions aside for lack of space. What matters for our purposes here is the conclusion, emerging from (9b) and (9c), that adverbial material can check structural accusative Case.

This takes us one step closer to the answer to the question of what the (*wh*-)pronoun or quantifier might be doing in rhetorical questions in which it cannot be mapped into the verb's object position. These elements could be very much like the accusative adverbial *többet* in (9b,c): structurally Case-marked non-arguments. For (8), this is immediately plausible: the *wh*-word in (8) alternates with bare nominal adverbials, as in (10):

- (10)
- a. I don't care a thing/hoot that/if/whether S!
 - b. het kan me niets/niet veel/geen fluit schelen dat/of S!
it can me nothing/not much/no flute concern that/if S
 - c. az nem érdekel semmit hogy/ha S!
it not interest nothing.ACC that/if S

From (10b) we learn that *veel* 'much', the same element we found in rhetorical (3a), occurs in the non-interrogative counterpart to (8b).⁵ And in (10c) we see *semmit* 'nothing.ACC', which is morphologically built on *mit* 'what.ACC', being used non-argumentally, with the accusative Case we also see on *többet* 'much' in (9b,c).

- (i) *János nagyot könyvet olvasott
János large.ACC book.ACC read
intended: 'János reads books a lot'
- (ii) ha valaki többet olvas újságot, mint amennyit tévézlik, ...
if someone more.ACC reads newspaper.ACC than as.much.ACC watches.tv
[<http://olvasas.opkm.hu/index.php?menuId=442&action=article&id=401>]
- (iii) kinél olvasol többet újságot?
who.to read.2SG more.ACC newspaper.ACC

5 But unfortunately, non-argumental *veel* does not normally combine with stative verbs such as *weten* 'know'. The fact that (ib) is ungrammatical thus muddies the waters for the hypothesis that *veel* in rhetorical (ia) is being used adverbially.

- (i) a. weet ik veel wat hij uitgespookt heeft?!
know I much what he out-ghosted has
'what do I know/heaven knows what he's been up to'
- b. *ik weet veel wat hij uitgespookt heeft
I know much what he out-ghosted has

Though *semmit* in (10c) is based on *mit*, it is not a question word. So the next logical step in the analysis of (5b) is to link the adverbial use of accusative-marked material directly to interrogative *mit* itself. We can do this with the help of examples such as those in (11), where *mit* ‘what’ is essentially equivalent to *miért* ‘why, what for’.

- (11) a. mit állsz ott?
 what.ACC stand.2SG.INDEF there
 (lit.) ‘what are you standing there?’
 b. mit piszkálsz azt a széket?
 what.ACC fidget.2SG.DEF that.ACC the chair.ACC
 (lit.) ‘what are you fidgeting with that chair?’

Transitive (11b) is particularly interesting because it shows, once again, that *mit*, despite its accusativity, is not the object of the verb: what serves as the object here is clearly *azt a széket* ‘that chair’, which controls definite agreement on *piszkálsz*. We have here, it seems, a very close relative to the use of *mit* in rhetorical (5b) and (7). It serves us well in arguing for the adverbial status of *mit* in these Hungarian sentences.

The picture for the other two languages under examination is not quite so simple. While Dutch also features the adverbial use of the *wh*-word corresponding to English *what* seen in Hungarian (11) (*wat sta je daar nou?* ‘what stand you there now’), *wat* is peculiarly absent from the set of pronouns/quantifiers figuring in (3). I will come back to this below. And while *what* does show up in English (1), there is no (productive) use of *what* as an adverbial element in constructions of the type in (11): *what are you standing there *(for)?* is bad without *for* (but it is probably relevant that that in null-operator relatives, dropping *for* IS possible: *the reason I was standing there*).

Still, its indefinite use in the form of *somewhat*, illustrated in (12), suggests that *what* does have adverbial functions. And not surprisingly, *somewhat* is compatible with the presence of an object clause (see (12b)), just as *what* is in (2).⁶

- (12) a. I like this somewhat
 b. I am somewhat worried that this might not be right

6 Jespersen (1961:Vol. V, p. 498) says of ‘the familiar phrase *I’ll tell you what*’ that ‘*what* has approximately the meaning of an indefinite pronoun; cf. *somewhat*’. It is telling, however, that he treats this construction, however briefly, in a section entitled ‘Incomplete Questions’ — a characterisation that strikes me as entirely appropriate for this kind of expression: rather than functioning as an indefinite pronoun, *what* here seems to introduce an elliptical *wh*-clause (a ‘sluice’). The same is likely to be the correct analysis for *you know what?*, which, as Jespersen (p. 498) points out, goes back at least to Chaucer (*wite ye what* ‘know you what’) and Shakespeare (*wot you what* ‘know you what’). This latter type is found in present-day Dutch as well: *weet je wat?* A third ‘incomplete question’ (technically, another sluicing case) belonging to the same family of constructions is *guess what*. These are all structurally robustly different from the rhetorical question under discussion in the main text.

Jespersen (1961:Vol. V, p. 500) also mentions a use of *what* that seems potentially quite closely related to that seen in (1):

- (i) a. what do you say we go out to-night? (Ernest Hemingway)
 b. what d’ye say we head for the coast? (Jack London)
 c. what do you say we stop a few days? (Jack London)

Jespersen classifies these as ‘pseudo-questions’ of a type found in American English only. Perhaps surprisingly, Jespersen does not mention rhetorical questions of the type in (1) in his brief discussion of ‘pseudo-questions’. It may seem plausible to think that there is a connection between the use of *what* in (i) and that in (1), esp. if the clause following *say* in (i) is the object of *say* — but that is hard to ascertain: it may very well be that we are dealing here with two paratactically rather than hypotactically related clauses (cf. *what do you say? shall we go out tonight?*, or *what do you say to the following: we go out tonight*). Though it may be possible to think of (i) as structurally related to (1), too little is known about the syntax of (i) and especially about the function of *what* to make it possible to say anything with confidence in this connection.

Perhaps related as well is the peculiar use of *what* in combination with *with* in expressions such as the following, ‘used to talk about the reasons for a particular situation, especially a bad or difficult situation’ (Cambridge Dictionary on-line):

- (13) a. what with school and sports, she’s always busy
 (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/what%20with)
 b. I’m very tired, what with travelling all day
 (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/what-with)
 c. she was sleeping very badly these days, what with the new baby and all the activity surrounding him
 (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/what_with)
 d. what with all you have to carry, we should take a taxi
 (http://www.dictionary.com/browse/what-with)
 e. what with the children being at home and my parents coming to stay, I have too much to do
 (http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/what+with)
 f. the police are having a difficult time, what with all the drugs and violence on our streets
 (http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/what-with)

There is no obvious function for the *what* of *what with S*: it seems redundant, in light of the fact that a semantic contribution for it is hard to discern, and the examples in (14) remain grammatical with *what* dropped. Its optionality is compatible with *what* being an adverbial modifier of sorts, though it remains unclear exactly what kind of modifying role it could play here, and how that role (whatever it be) could be related to the one played by *what* in (1).

3 *What’s more: A null operator*

If the previous section makes it reasonable to think that the (*wh*-)pronoun/quantifier in rhetorical constructions with *know* can have an adverbial function, what is left to address is the fact that there is more to these rhetorical constructions than the adverbial use of a (*wh*-)pronoun or quantifier. In particular, what is striking about these sentences is that we systematically see the activation of a functional projection in the left periphery, resulting in fronting of the adverbially used *wh*-pronoun and/or the inversion of the subject and the finite verb.⁷

- | | | | | |
|------|----|-------------------------|----|-----------------|
| (14) | a. | what do I know?! | vs | *I know what?! |
| | b. | weet ik veel?! | vs | *ik weet veel?! |
| | | know I much | | *veel weet ik?! |
| | c. | mit tudom én?! | vs | *én tudom mit?! |
| | | what.ACC know.1SG.DEF I | | |

For English and Hungarian, the ungrammaticality the right-hand examples in (14) is not difficult to understand: *wh*-operators resist being *in situ* except in special registers (such as ‘echo questions’) which are irrelevant here. But the Dutch case is very interesting because of the fact that the quantifier *veel* itself is not being fronted — and in fact CANNOT be fronted: **veel weet ik?!*. Nonetheless, it is definitely the case that something has fronted to the immediately preverbal position: Dutch is a Verb Second language; in all root sentences in which the verb is in surface-initial position (including yes/no questions and topic-drop sentences), it is arguably the case that the preverbal position is occupied by something — a null operator.

⁷ The examples in the right-hand column are either simply ungrammatical or, to the extent that they are well-formed, do not support a rhetorical reading equivalent to that of the examples in the left-hand column. This is what the asterisks are meant to show.

I would like to argue that the null operator in Dutch (14b)=(3a) is a modifier of *veel*, originating within the projection of *veel* and stranding *veel* under movement to sentence-initial position. Relevant in this context is the syntax of the exclamatives in (15), where the operator combining with *veel* is overt — and realised, interestingly in light of the English facts, as *wat* ‘what’.

- (15) a. *wat veel weet ik (zeg)!*
 what much know I DPRT⁸
 b. *wat weet ik veel (zeg)!*
 what know I much DPRT
 ‘boy, I really know a lot!’

In (15) *wat veel* ‘what a lot’ originates as a constituent, serving as the object of the verb *weet* ‘know’. It can stay together as a constituent and front as a unit, as in (15a). But in (15b), *wh*-fronting affects just the *wh*-operator *wat*, causing *veel* to be left behind clause-internally and producing a pattern similar to the one seen in (3a).

It is now plausible to hypothesise that (14b) involves splitting in the same way as (15b), and that what is raised into the left periphery of the clause in the derivation of (14b) is a null counterpart of the *wh*-operator *wat* ‘what’. This makes (14b) an instance of ‘*wh*-drop’, a phenomenon known independently to be possible in Dutch, esp. in rhetorical questions (which often feature the discourse particle *nou*) — including, most relevantly, cases in which *wat* has an adverbial function, as in (16b), the counterpart to Hungarian (11a).⁹

- (16) a. (*wat*) *heb je nou gedaan?*
 what have you now done
 ‘now what have you done?’
 b. (*wat*) *sta je daar nou?*
 what stand you there now
 (lit.) ‘what are you standing there?’

While exclamative (15b) alternates with a pied-piping derivation, as in (15a), pied-piping of *veel* is impossible in the case of (14b): **veel weet ik?!* is bad. This is in line with the hypothesis that (14b) involves a null operator: for null operators we know that they generally cannot partake in pied-piping, as shown, for instance, by the contrast in (17).

- (17) a. I am looking for something [OP to talk [about *ec*]]
 b. *I am looking for something [[about OP] to talk *ec*]

It remains somewhat mysterious why overt *wat* does not occur in rhetorical questions of the type in (3), either in combination with stranded *veel* or on its own. Put differently (from the perspective of the analysis proposed), it is unclear why ‘*wh*-drop’ is apparently obligatory in (14b)=(3a). It is certainly true that rhetorical questions lend themselves particularly well to ‘*wh*-drop’. But I am not aware of any rhetorical *wh*-questions in Dutch other than (14b)=(3a) in which ‘*wh*-drop’ is an absolute requirement.

8 ‘DPRT’ stands for ‘discourse particle’; the use of *zeg* in (15) is best rendered in English with the aid of sentence-initial *boy*.

9 The link with ‘*wh*-drop’ is I think enhanced by the fact that (14b)=(3a) can be reduced in speech to just *tik veel?!* (where the *t* is the coda consonant of *weet*), just like (16a) can be reduced to *bie nou gedaan?* (where *b* is the coda of *heb*, and *ie* is reduction of *je* contracted onto *heb* — cf. *hebbie* ‘have you’).

4 What's up? The analysis in a nutshell

With (18) as the derivation for the exclamative with splitting in (15b), we end up with (19a) as the derivation for (14b)=(3a). The QP-constituent formed by the null operator and *veel* occupies an adverbial adjunction position, shown in (19b), when the object position is taken by a clausal object, as in (4a) (recall section 2).

- (18) $[_{CP} \text{wat}_i [_{C'} \text{weet}_j [_{TP} \text{ik} [_{T'} t_j [_{VP} t_j [_{QP} t_i \text{veel}]]]]]]]$
 (19) a. $[_{CP} \text{OP}_i [_{C'} \text{weet}_j [_{TP} \text{ik} [_{T'} t_j [_{VP} t_j [_{QP} t_i \text{veel}]]]]]]]$
 b. $[_{CP} \text{OP}_i [_{C'} \text{weet}_j [_{TP} \text{ik} [_{T'} t_j [_{VP} [_{QP} t_i \text{veel}] [_{VP} t_j [_{CP} \dots]]]]]]]]]$

For the variant of (3a) featuring pronominal *'t*, given in (3b), I would like to tentatively suggest an analysis along similar lines, with the null operator this time stranding *'t* — the coda consonant of both the pronoun *het* and the *wh*-word *wat*.

- (20) a. $[_{CP} \text{OP}_i [_{C'} \text{weet}_j [_{TP} \text{ik} [_{T'} t_j [_{VP} t_j [_{DP} t_i 't]]]]]]]$
 b. $[_{CP} \text{OP}_i [_{C'} \text{weet}_j [_{TP} \text{ik} [_{T'} t_j [_{VP} [_{DP} t_i 't] [_{VP} t_j [_{CP} \dots]]]]]]]]]$

The treatment of *'t* as a remnant of null operator movement produces a split *wh*-operator, with the (silent) *wh*-portion up in SpecCP and the restriction (*-t*, for [+NEUTER]) in the extraction site. Such splitting is certainly unusual: Dutch does not generally go about leaving *'t* behind under *wh*-fronting, so why this does seem to happen in (3b) needs to be investigated further. But if this is indeed what is going on in (3b), we can understand why (3c) behaves differently. Demonstrative *dat* in (3c) evidently cannot be treated as the leftover bit of a split *wh*-quantifier: *dat* does not combine with any *wh*-operator; while *wa+ 't* produces grammatical *wat*, **wa+dat* is impossible. The fact that we cannot base-generate *dat* together with a null operator in a single constituent means that *dat* must occupy a position separate from the trace of the null operator in SpecCP. Since *dat* has no adverbial uses, this in turn means that, while the null operator can serve an adverbial function, *dat* must be mapped into the verb's object position in (3c): see (21). And this allows us to explain the ill-formedness of (4c), as anticipated above: with *dat* occupying the object position, there is no room for an additional object clause.

- (21) $[_{CP} \text{OP}_i [_{C'} \text{weet}_j [_{TP} \text{ik} [_{T'} t_j [_{VP} t_i [_{VP} t_j \text{dat} (*CP)]]]]]]]]]$

In English and Hungarian, the operator in SpecCP is overt (*what* in English, *mit* in Hungarian), and it does not strand anything inside VP. Another difference between Dutch, on the one hand, and English and Hungarian, on the other, concerns the distribution of the adverbial adjunction strategy. In Dutch, this strategy can be exploited only when something else occupies the object position: *weten* 'know' licenses neither Unspecified Object Deletion (as English *know* does: *oh, I know!*) nor pro-drop (as does Hungarian *tudom* 'know.1SG.DEF'). In English and Hungarian, on the other hand, the wider availability of a silent object for *know/tud* makes it possible (and apparently desirable) for the operator to be consistently mapped into the structure as an adverbial adjunct, with the verb's object position being unprojected (as in the case of English UOD), occupied by object-*pro* (in Hungarian (5b)), or taken by an object clause (as in (2) and (6b)).

- (22) $[_{CP} \text{what}_i [_{C'} \text{do}_j [_{TP} \text{I} [_{T'} t_j [_{VP} [_{QP} t_i] [_{VP} \text{know} \{\emptyset, [_{CP} \dots]\}]]]]]]]]]$
 (23) $[_{\text{FocP}} \text{mit}_i [_{\text{Foc}'} \text{tudom}_j [_{TP} \text{én} [_{T'} t_j [_{VP} [_{QP} t_i] [_{VP} t_j \{pro, [_{CP} \dots]\}]]]]]]]]]$

The structures in (22) and (23) complete the picture for the rhetorical *wh*-questions in (1)/(2) and (5b)/(6b).

Dedication

It is with great pleasure and admiration that I present this paper to Ádám Nádasy on the occasion of his 70th birthday and retirement from the Department of English Linguistics at Eötvös Loránd University. Ádám's generous offer to retire early if this could have helped to expedite my appointment to the Department is a deeply moving gesture revealing his support for me and his devotion to the cause of English linguistics at ELTE. Thankfully, in the end my appointment came through without Ádám's offer being needed, which made it possible for him to serve the Department all the way until his legally mandated retirement. I wish Ádám all the very best in the years to come, spent in the company of wonderful literature (to enjoy and to translate for others to enjoy), music, people, and everything else that makes life good.

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August 2016

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