

Mayfest 2005: Wh-fest; University of Maryland

"Deviation from canonical word order in wh-questions"

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Wh-movement often co-occurs with deviation from (or restrictions on) canonical word order in the area between the wh-phrase and the gap. This phenomenon has been the subject of extensive study for many years, and a variety of syntactic mechanisms and explanations have been proposed. Here I examine one instance of the phenomenon, the well-known case of inversion in Spanish wh-questions (e.g. Torrego 1984), and argue that its properties result not from the relatively complex syntactic mechanisms that have been considered until now, but from the interplay of very basic syntactic properties of the language and well-known considerations of sentence processing. Though this account shows promise of being extendable to other languages, it is interesting that it clearly cannot be extended to the superficially similar phenomenon in English of subject-aux inversion. The fact that "inversion" appears to arise in the two languages in such different ways (T-to-C movement in English, syntax/processing interplay in Spanish) should make us cautious in trying to force T-to-C movement to follow from deeper syntactic principles.