

Embedded Inverted Questions as Embedded Illocutionary Acts

Rebecca Woods

1. Introduction

Embedded inverted questions (EIQs) are a fairly well studied phenomenon in English dialects and have previously been analysed as evidence for direct CP recursion in Germanic languages. In this paper, their properties as speech reports will be further investigated and the CP recursion analysis will be updated, showing that the structure of EIQs has implications for our understanding of clausal selection and the possibility of embedded speech acts in natural language. Specifically, further evidence will be provided that not all cases of clausal complementation involve selection and evidence of embedded illocutionary force in English will be presented.

The paper is structured as follows; the key data on EIQs will be presented along with new observations on their meaning and use. Secondly, an analysis of the embedded clause itself will be presented which proposes that illocutionary force independent of the matrix force is available in EIQs. Thirdly, a proposal for the linking of the EIQ and the matrix clause will be made which accounts for both the embedded characteristics of the EIQ and its incompatibility with selection by the matrix verb. It will be proposed that the embedded clause refers to an utterance in a previous discourse and is identified as the content of the true complement to the matrix verb, namely a null nominal. The paper then concludes with directions for future research.

2. Data

2.1. Key features of EIQs

EIQs have most famously been studied by McCloskey (1992, 2006) and Henry (1995) in Hiberno English dialects. They also occur in a range of other British and non-British dialects, including North West England English (Woods, 2014), African American English (AAE; Green, 2002), Indian English (Bhatt, 2000) and New York English (C. Sailor and B. Pearson, p.c.). Their most salient features are the presence of subject-auxiliary inversion in an embedded clause and the (general) lack of overt complementisers. Example (1) contains paradigm examples of the EIQ construction, which can contain either a polar or wh-question:

- (1) a. I asked Jack was she in his class.
b. I wondered how did they get into the building. Irish English, McCloskey (2006)

EIQs have a highly restricted distribution. They typically appear under interrogative bridge verbs like those in (1) but are blocked under factive verbs (as in (2)); a state of affairs reminiscent of embedded verb second (EV2) contexts in Germanic.

- (2) *I found out how did they get into the building. Irish Eng., McCloskey (2006)

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There are also semantic similarities between EIQs and direct speech reports. Direct speech reports express entailments about the existence of a speech act in a prior discourse and the addressee of that speech act. For example, the direct speech report in (7a) is a direct question which was asked in a previous discourse. The EIQ equivalent in (7b) does not give rise to the same entailments, but it implies that the addressee is the person accused of having an affair - an implication that can be cancelled - and it presupposes that the question was at issue in a previous discourse:

- (7) a. I asked, “Are you having an affair?”
b. I asked was she having an affair.

Example (8) more clearly illustrates the presupposition inherent in the use of an EIQ. (8a), an indirect mental state report, does not presuppose that the question “Can Joe come to the party?” was asked in a previous discourse, or in fact discussed at all. (8a) can be used to describe a situation in which no-one talks about Joe coming to the party, but everyone knows that everyone else is thinking about it.

This is not possible if either (8b) or (8c) is used. (8b) entails that the question was directly asked, while (8c) presupposes that the question was discussed, if not necessarily directly asked. I propose that the EIQ constitutes a question which was at some point the question-under-discussion in the sense of Roberts (2012).

- (8) a. Everyone wanted to know whether Joe could come to the party.
b. Everyone wanted to know: “Is Joe coming to the party?”
c. Everyone wanted to know could Joe come to the party.

2.2.3. Characteristics of the EIQ alone

Finally, there are aspects of EIQs and their interpretation that are unlike both indirect and direct speech reports, for example their opacity to extraction. A small-scale grammaticality judgement task performed by speakers of EIQ dialects (n=9) shows that argument extraction from EIQs is judged worse than argument extraction from indirect speech reports, but better than argument extraction from direct speech reports. Scores were given on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 being completely ungrammatical and 7 being completely grammatical:

<i>EIQ</i>	4.33
<i>Indirect speech report</i>	5.43
<i>Direct speech report</i>	2.5

Table 1: Grammaticality judgements on extractability of arguments from different types of speech report

The case of adjunct extraction is less clear. An online question-answer study of 57 participants including 12 EIQ dialect speakers was conducted using scenarios followed by one of four types of question, as shown in (9).

- (9) *Scenario:* Sam was very excited. He was going to the park today. He bounced out of bed, stood at the top of the stairs and shouted really loud downstairs to his Mum, “Mum! Can we go to the park on our new bikes today?” She said, “Yes of course! But quiet down now Sam - you shouldn’t shout from the top of the stairs!”
How x EIQ: How did Sam ask could they go to the park?
How x Indirect: How did Sam ask if they could go to the park?
Where x EIQ: Where did Sam ask could he ride his bike?
Where x Indirect: Where did Sam ask if he could ride his bike?

The results show that all participants were more likely to extract adjuncts—interpret the matrix wh-word as extracted from the embedded clause—from EIQs than from indirect speech reports, though EIQ dialect speakers extracted less frequently overall. There was also an item effect: almost all adjuncts judged as extracted from the embedded clause were *where*-adjuncts; *how*-adjuncts were very rarely

judged as extracted.⁴

EIQs also differ from direct and indirect speech reports in their sensitivity to the pragmatics of orientation. Some EIQs with third-person matrix arguments and first/second-person embedded arguments are hard to resolve if they are string-identical to direct speech and pragmatically unlikely:

- (10) Unclear perspectives
- a. John asked Mary, “Could I_{John} meet you_{Mary} at the weekend?”
 - b. John asked Mary if I_{speaker} could meet you_{addressee} at the weekend.
 - c. John asked Mary could I_{speaker} meet you_{addressee} at the weekend.

Without context it is easy to construe (10c) instead as a direct speech quotation because of its string similarity and because it is hard to see why John could ask that question of Mary and expect an answer. Context improves the ease of achieving this reading:

- (11) *Context: John is my secretary, Mary is yours and we are overdue a meeting.*
John asked Mary could I_{speaker} meet you_{addressee} at the weekend.

When the EIQ cannot be string-identical to direct speech (without assuming a very odd context) the EIQ reading is easier to achieve:

- (12) John asked Mary did I_{speaker} meet you_{addressee} at the weekend.

2.3. Summary

The established and the new observations above show that EIQs are neither like indirect nor direct speech reports, but share characteristics with both. They are clearly syntactically embedded due to the presence of Sequence of Tense phenomena, the lack of indexical shift and the restrictions on their linear position. Along with the fact that EIQs do not *entail* an original questioning act, this suggests that they are not instances of mixed quotation either.⁵ However, they are like independent clauses in that they permit expressive elements and root-like structures, they presuppose that a real questioning act occurred in a previous discourse regardless of the exact matrix predicate and they make implications about the identity of the addressee. These facts are due to the structure of the EIQ. It is proposed that the EIQ is subordinate to the matrix clause but is not selected by it; instead, the EIQ expresses information, both propositional and expressive, about the true nominal complement to the matrix verb.

3. The structure of the EIQ

In this section I follow the spirit of the CP recursion analysis of EIQs (McCloskey, 2006) but look to differentiate between the two C heads he proposes at the top of the structure.

3.1. The Illocutionary Act Phrase

I propose that the EIQ has as its highest projection an Illocutionary Act Phrase (IAP) similar to the Speech Act Phrase proposed by Hill (2007) in the tradition of Speas & Tenny (2003). The structure of the IAP is shown in (13) for the sentence “[I asked him] please would he cook dinner for me.”

- (13) [_{IAP} [CENTRE OF EVALUATION] [_{IA'} [_{IA} please] [_{ForceP} [_{Force} *#wh* would] [_{TP}he cook dinner for me]]]]

The structure in (13) retains the key aspects of McCloskey’s (2006) CP recursion analysis, in particular that ForceP is selected by a functional head. However, this structure can answer some of the problematic aspects of CP recursion hypotheses and can better account for some of the interpretive properties of the EIQ.

The analysis above avoids problems of ‘counting’ raised by CP recursion analyses, namely the lack of restrictions on the number of CPs which can embed another CP (cf. Iatridou & Kroch (1992)). As IA^o

⁴ See Woods (forthcoming) for full results.

⁵ Thanks to Hotze Rullmann for this question.

and Force^o are distinguished featurally and functionally, there is no debate about the number of iterations that may occur or their relative ordering.

The IA head is the key difference between an EIQ, in which it is present, and an indirect speech report, in which it is not. It is due to the IA head that the EIQ carries the presupposition of a question under discussion, as it encodes in the EIQ independent illocutionary force which is absent in the indirect speech report.⁶ It is the presence of the IA head which permits discourse particles that lexicalise illocutionary force, such as *please* (Woods, submitted) to occur in this embedded context and not in others. The IA head and the Force head must be of compatible types; for example, the Force head cannot be declarative in EIQs. The mechanism for this will be developed in section 4.

The IAP also contains in its specifier the Centre of Evaluation (CofE). This is a bundle of features including deictic and temporal coordinates pertaining to the discourse participants in the original discourse, as well as information about their statuses relative to each other. The CofE is not a referential DP itself as in Speas & Tenny (2003), Hill (2007) and others, nor is indexicality determined by the presence of speaker and addressee arguments in the CP layer, but is akin to a situation pronoun as conceived of by Schwarz (2012).⁷ This is because the effect of the presence of the CofE is more semantic than syntactic; it is present to determine the orientation of expressive phrases. There is evidence from the interpretation of the subject in embedded imperatives in languages like Japanese and Korean, as well as English, that there are covert elements which shift perspective when overt phi-feature shifting is not otherwise available in the language (Kaufmann, 2015). Following Shklovsky and Sudo's (2014) account for overt phi-feature shifting in Uyghur, I claim that there is a similar syntactically present contextual operator which determines the orientation of covert perspectival elements such as the subject of embedded imperatives, speech act adverbs and discourse markers, and that this operator is the CofE. The presence of the CofE also allows for implications about the identity of the addressee when no information is expressed in the matrix clause (cf. (7b)). The CofE is therefore an instrument of reference to help interpret the EIQ.

3.2. Whence the IAP?

The pressing question now is: where does the IAP come from? I assume that the IAP is not part of the same phrasal spine as the CP, but the IA head is a determiner-like head that selects for ForceP.

There is evidence that both DP-like and non-DP-like clausal complements exist in natural language. Clauses are DP-like in the following ways: clausal complements can enter into equative constructions, suggesting they are entities, and are blocked from small clause constructions, suggesting that they are not predicative (Potts, 2002:67-68); EIQs and other *that*-less clauses cannot be complements to nouns or sentential subjects; and crosslinguistically, clausal complements may be headed by determiners to induce a particular interpretation, as in the Hebrew examples in (14) from Kastner (2015:160).

- (14) a. Hu hisbir [še-ha-binyan karas] (aval hu lo be'emet karas)
 he explained COMP-the-building collapsed but he NEG really collapsed
 "He explained that the building collapsed (but it didn't really)."
 b. Hu hisbir et [ze še-ha-binyan karas] (#aval hu lo be'emet karas)
 he explained ACC this COMP-the-building collapsed but he NEG really collapsed
 "He explained the fact that the building collapsed (#but it didn't really)."

EIQs specifically share some properties with content nouns which non-EIQ complement clauses and clausal complements to nouns do not (cf. Moulton (2009) on Potts (2002)): they can be described in terms of properties such as *nice* and *nasty*, as in (15); they (or at least, the QUDs they presuppose) come into existence at certain times; and they can also cease to exist, for example when they are answered.

⁶ Note that this does not mean that the EIQ is a separate speech act independent from the matrix clause; it is not necessarily the case that the EIQ can be 'answered' in lieu of the matrix clause. The question of whether an embedded clause can be a Main Point of Utterance (Simons, 2007)—which it can, but not obligatorily—is a separate question to the one posed here.

⁷ This may yet turn out not to be the correct analysis depending on the conceptualisation of the semantics of situation pronouns. For discussion of another approach that captures the same characteristics of the CofE in which it is characterised as a covert Vocative phrase, see Woods (forthcoming).

- (15) A: You asked me did I cook dinner for you
 B: No I didn't, I asked did you make me a cup of tea
 B': No I didn't, I was much more polite about it than that!⁸

They also share certain characteristics with factive clauses, which have been analysed as 'referential' CPs—clauses selected by a definite determiner—by Kastner (2015), following de Cuba & Ürögdi (2010) and others. Both EIQs and factive complements are weak islands and there is a strong connection between the argument(s) in the matrix clause and the embedded clause in the sense that the embedded clause contains information about the motivations and emotions of the matrix arguments (the matrix clause is not simply interpreted as a parenthetical, cf. McCloskey (2006)). Moreover, they both pick out discourse objects as referents: a factive complement refers to an accepted proposition in the discourse just as an EIQ refers to an accepted QUD (a QUD that both participants commit to resolving) in the discourse.

For these reasons I propose that the IA head in EIQs is a determiner-like element that selects for ForceP. This determiner-like element also encodes the illocutionary force of the clause below it and so it denotes an abstract discourse object, namely a QUD. This analysis also has repercussions for our understanding of the Centre of Evaluation; it is structurally analogous to the possessor in a possessor DP construction, so the CofE and the clause are related via the IA head rather than as co-arguments to a lexical head. This is a desirable result because it captures the flexibility of the relationship between the discourse context and the clause which the argument structural analysis cannot. Furthermore, an argument structural analysis does not capture aspects of the original discourse situation such as the respective statuses of the discourse participants and their understanding of each other's aims and commitments, which the CofE analysis presented here can. This is crucial because elements relating to the relationship status of the participants can be represented in embedded contexts, for example honorific-marked verb forms in certain Japanese embedded clauses (Sauerland & Yatsushiro (2014) *inter alia*). If there is no recourse to the correct discourse context, the correct honorific marking cannot be established.

Note that, even if the proposed determiner is silent, there must be some overt marker that the clause is a quasi-quotational construction rather than a standard clause. In EIQs and similar constructions, such as Germanic EV2 and recomplementation phenomena in Spanish (Villa-García, 2015) and Catalan (González i Planas, 2014), in which embedded illocutionary force appears to be present, it is also necessary that some element is moved into or base-generated in the expanded CP layer which is not present in the force-less counterpart embedded clause. To illustrate, the syntactic effects (doubling of the complementiser and root phenomena) and semantic effects (quotative interpretation) of recomplementation cannot occur unless a discourse-oriented phrase appears in the CP layer (Catalan example in (16) from González i Planas (2014:59)).

- (16) a. En Nicolau m'ha dit que sincerament que no està content.
 The Nicolau 1CL-has said that sincerely that NEG is satisfied
 "Nicolau said to me that sincerely (he) is not satisfied."
Low reading of adverb, quotative interpretation
- b. En Nicolau m'ha dit sincerament que no està content.
No low reading of adverb; no quotative interpretation

Furthermore, while there is a imperative counterpart to the EIQ, as in (17), there is no declarative counterpart.

- (17) My girlfriend said don't call her.

I propose that this is because there is no overt marking of a declarative containing independent illocutionary force compared with a force-less declarative—there is no verb movement to C as in Germanic EV2, or some other kind of overt evidence—and so the declarative counterpart of the EIQ is not available in English.

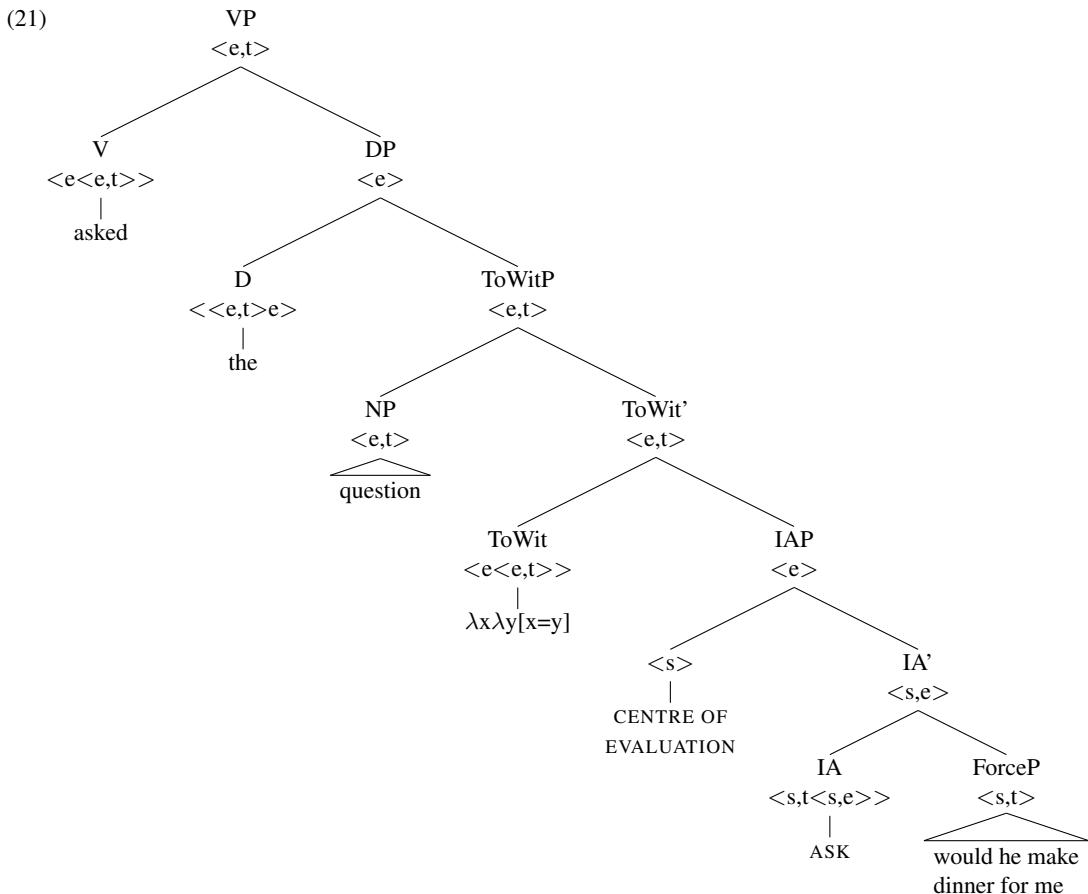
⁸ Note that this is not an appropriate response to an indirect question like "You asked me if I had cooked dinner for you."

The link between the nominal complement to the verb and the utterance entity is a functional head, here called ToWit.¹² ToWit identifies the nominal *question* with the IAP. Its meaning is $\lambda x \lambda y [x=y]$; essentially, it is an identity function. ToWit may be ‘pronounced’ in the case that the nominal is also pronounced: its realisation may be an intonational pause, represented by the colon in (19) or the copula in an example like (20) from the British National Corpus¹³. I claim that this is the locus of variation between EIQ dialects and non-EIQ-dialects;¹⁴ the latter does not permit null spell-out of ToWit⁰, which means the overt spell-out of the nominal *question* is also always required.

(19) I asked him a simple question: did he see her that night?

(20) The question is: can they get it to work a second time? BNC

The outcome of the proposed structure, as illustrated below in (21), is as follows: the content and the expressive aspects of the IAP are identified as those of the question asked, without being complement to the verb *ask*. This happens via predicate modification.¹⁵ This means that the content and expressive aspects of the IAP can be questioned separately from the event of asking a question. Moreover, in addition to the IAP carrying questioning force (as expressed by the IA head), the EIQ will be identified as a question rather than a fact or a musing, in contrast to indirect interrogatives reports which can potentially be interpreted in all three ways.



¹² Hat-tip to Eytan Zweig for naming ToWitP.

¹³ Examples of usage taken from the British National Corpus (BNC) were obtained under the terms of the BNC End User Licence. Copyright in the individual texts cited resides with the original IPR holders. For information and licensing conditions relating to the BNC, please see the web site at <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk>.

¹⁴ Thanks to Bradley Larson for his question on this point, with apologies for my terrible on-the-spot response.

¹⁵ Thanks to Patrick Elliott for helping me clarify my ideas here.

(21) is a structural representation of the concept of questions as conversational moves in Roberts's (2012) working out of the QUD framework. She notes that conversational moves—the subquestions that are under discussion throughout a conversation—are “not speech acts but the semantic objects which are used in speech acts.” As the EIQ is analysed as a referential entity, it is necessary that there is some referent, here some conversational move, for it to refer to, either in the relevant previous discourse or in the current one.

Finally, the structural dependence of the IAP on the matrix clause is established, with the result that indexicality and tense are contingent on the matrix clause and the IAP cannot be fronted. Ultimately there is no effect of ‘same-saying’ associated with the EIQ as there is with direct speech, though the EIQ hints at the shape of and expressive content contained within the original speech act.

4.2. Consequences for the distribution of EIQs and other questions

The structure above seems to account for the properties of the EIQ, but how can it account for the EIQ's restricted distribution? It is possible that embedded illocutionary acts as they are understood here, as the representation of a real utterance, will be restricted to languages which allow verbs to take cognate or near-cognate nouns as their complements. This predicts that, for example, French will not have embedded speech acts as one cannot **demander la question*, but that German (*fragen die Frage*) and Spanish (*preguntar la pregunta*) will. So far this is borne out, but many more languages need to be examined before this can be considered a good predictor.

In the same vein, can we predict the distribution of EIQs based on whether or not a given verb can take *question* as a nominal complement? This does not seem desirable; this sort of explanation would still link back to the selection properties of the verb, and whilst examples of “want to know the question”¹⁶ and “wonder the question”¹⁷ followed by a clause can, however improbably, be found, examples of “don't know the question” plus clause are not attested. Moreover, examples of EIQs such as “Go and see did they come yet” (AAE; Green, 2002) would not be accounted for under such assumptions.

A semantic explanation for the distribution of EIQs is preferable and may also better account for cross-linguistic differences in the distribution of embedded illocutionary acts such as Germanic EV2 and recomplementation. It is clear that EIQs are polarity sensitive given that they are only licensed under a modal, negative or interrogative operator—assuming, as Lahiri (2002) does, that interrogative verbs like *say* contain some element which licenses negative polarity items. Moreover, the existence of English EIQs and recomplementation under interrogative verbs in Spanish and Catalan suggests that Hooper and Thompson's (1973) claim that assertion is the key feature which licenses embedded root phenomenon cannot be maintained. The details of how EIQs are licensed remains for future work.

5. Conclusion

EIQs are a quasi-quotational method for reporting speech. They do not introduce the indexical shifting and verbatim inferences which come with direct speech, but they presuppose that the question they contain was once the question under discussion and they express the force and expressive aspects of an original speech act in a way that indirect speech reports cannot.

More importantly, EIQs provide an interesting data set to examine both the nature of clausal complementation and the possibility that illocutionary acts may not always constitute independent clauses. They have a full left periphery and are selected by an Illocutionary Act head. This head imbues the EIQ with embedded illocutionary force and permits root phenomena such as subject-auxiliary inversion and the adjunction of topics and speech act adverbs, amongst others. The IAP is also responsible for shifting the question contained within the EIQ into a referential entity. Parallels were drawn between EIQs and similar quasi-quotational phenomena in Spanish and the Germanic languages. It is suggested that the IAP may only occur—and with it these quasi-quotational interpretations—if overt marking occurs in the CP layer in some form.

¹⁶ “However, it is an industry-wide problem in the UK and I know you will all want to know the question are we done, are we done on conduct.” Taken from www.nab.com.au/content/dam/nab/about.../NAB_Update_091014.doc.

¹⁷ “If you own a website [...] you probably may have wondered the question, is maintenance for a website really needed”. Taken from <http://webdesy.com/the-importance-of-website-maintenance/>.

It is also proposed that EIQs are not selected by the matrix verb but are identified as the content of the true complement of the matrix verb, a nominal, by a functional head here named ToWit. In this way the EIQ is interpreted as a representation of a question under discussion in the original discourse and can carry expressive, not-at-issue content which may be questioned in the current discourse.

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