

Ross's evidence against the WH-island constraint

- (1) Chomsky (1964) observed that embedded questions disallow extraction from them, and formulated a constraint that had the effect of excluding such cases. A version of the constraint came to be called the WH-island constraint.
- (2) *What did he wonder where John put [Chomsky's ex. I assume coreference is not intended between 'he' and 'John' as that would violate an independent constraint.]
- (3) Ross (1967) explicitly rejected this constraint of Chomsky's arguing that it is too strong, though he conceded that Chomsky's example is, indeed, unacceptable.
- (4) He told me about a book which I can't figure out whether to buy or not.
how to read.
where to obtain.
what to do about.
- (5) This seems to be the familiar control clause exemption. In fact Ross pointed out that these involve infinitival embedded questions, but didn't venture a hypothesis about why that should make a difference.
- (6) Ross also provided another type of counter-example to Chomsky's constraint:
 - (7) Which books did he tell you why he wanted to read
?whether
??when
[The annotations are Ross's. To my ear all three of these are virtually perfect **with coreference**, and, as Ross notes, far better than Chomsky's example.]
 - (8) About these, Ross said they "differ in no way I can discern from ... Chomsky's example."
p.21
 - (9) Maybe we can discern a way. These seem to instantiate the bound subject effect.

Chomsky, Noam. 1964. *Current issues in linguistic theory*. The Hague: Mouton.

Ross, John Robert. 1967. *Constraints on variables in syntax*. Doctoral dissertation, MIT, Cambridge, Mass. Published as *Infinite syntax!* Norwood, N.J.: Ablex (1986).