Language between Modularity and Subsystems as Self-Contained Linguistic Components: Wh-Words as a Case Study

Mustapha Boughoulid (mustbough@gmail.com)
Cadi Ayyad University, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Marrakech, Morocco

Abstract*: Modern linguistics has always witnessed the linguists' tendencies to break down language into different modules or subsystems because they are self-contained and domain free having their own specific characteristics. In fact, all the natural languages evoke a variety of sub-systems, which are highly functional, operational, demarkable, identifiable, teachable, learnable, and highly pragmatic; the fact that helps to make of them an integral part of the students' linguistic knowledge. However, the focus of this study is on the Wh-words as a sub-system through which we tried to answer the question about our purpose behind their analysis by using a linguistic corpus based on three novels. The analysis is done by being based on four linguistic factors, the form, the meaning, the structure, and the pragmatic use, a long side with the textual context of these terms and their exploration in terms of the semantic field they evoke in different contexts.*

Keywords: Clefts, Corpus Analysis, Linguistic Components, Modularity, Wh-Words

1. Introduction

It has been a good practice in modern linguistics that linguists break down language into different modules or subsystems. The term "modular" has been coined by Fodor (1983). He stated that the human language is somehow modular because modules are self-contained and domain specific that each module has its own properties. Hence, we can talk about language modularity as it is characterised through three senses: having different levels of analysis, being composed of different subsystems, and as a different linguistic mechanism with various levels. Another new level of modularity in the teaching of language is practical and pragmatical in the sense that within a language it is taken as a subsystem because it is part of this language. Thus, different examples of subsystems can be evoked such as prepositions, wh-words, pronouns, etc.

However, we should always ask the question, "What do we need to know when we learn such subsystems?"They are called subsystems because they are self-contained and highly functional, operational, demarkable, identifiable, teachable, learnable, and highly pragmatic, which makes them part of the students' linguistic knowledge. All the subsystems are domain free and independent with their own linguistic properties.

2. Levels of Modularity

We use the term "modular" in three senses:

a. The sense in which human language consists of different levels of analysis where each one of them is studied independently from the other cognitive faculties such intelligence, perception, attention, memory, etc.

b. Language consists of some cognitive, internal, and underlying subsystems à la Chomsky (1975). That is to say, language is modular because the human faculty that is called "language" consists of autonomous modules. For example, in syntax, the case filter and the binding theory are two independent modules where each one of them works on its own. The "module" in this sense is a language subsystem, which is independent from other subsystems.

c. "Modularity" is exposed in the sense that language itself is modular because it is a system or a mechanism that is independent from the other cognitive faculties and mechanisms. Hence, language has been recognised as undergoing some kind of double articulation (Jakobson, 1995), which means when one uses a language he/she is behaving at different and independent levels at the same time. For example, one uses the syntax and phonology of the same language with their different rules in a simultaneous way, but in an interrelated manner.

3. The Fourth Level of Modularity

The fourth sense of modularity is practical and pragmatical in teaching a language. Within a language, a module is a subsystem, which is part of it. Thus, one can state different subsystems. For example, we have the nominative pronouns, prepositions, talking about time, describing oneself or others, etc. If we take the example of talking about time, one should find out what he/she needs to know to tell time in English. For instance, one needs to count from one to fifty-nine, to know how to use the two prepositions "to" and "past" in British English, and "to" and "after" in American English. This is part of what this subsystem takes because it is self-contained. For example, the prepositions "to" and "after" work together with hours and numbers. It is a module, but what makes it different from the other senses of modules is that it is functionally operational, demarkable because one can make a list of the things that the students are supposed to learn, identifiable, teachable, learnable, and highly pragmatic. It is a part of the students' linguistic knowledge. If they learn it in this way, they will be able to tell time appropriately.

Another example of a subsystem is the use of nominative pronouns in English. The question one needs to raise is: what do we need to know when we learn these pronouns? One needs to know that they occur at the beginning of a sentence, how to use them with the verb "to be" agreement, that with "he", "she", and "it", it is always "is", and with the simple present, the verb takes an "s" at the end. They can also be used in some structures such as:

Clefts: the word order in clefts is: "it" followed by the verb to be, followed by the pronoun, as the examples shown:

a. It is I who did it.

b. It is you who did it.

Phatic Relative Clauses:

Example: *He who does not like to visit us, we do not want to visit him.*

It is a part of the language components we need to know in order to learn the subsystem of the nominative pronouns.

What the above examples have in common is that they are all highly functional, demarkable, identifiable, teachable, and learnable. This is the concept of the fourth module, which is practical and domain free because it is independent with its own properties. It is not just phonology or syntax, etc. It is all of them. It is not abstract. It is highly functional and identifiable by making a list of what the students need to know.

4. Open and Close Word Classes

4.1. Open word classes

Open word classes are not necessarily limited. They are highly productive because we can add prefixes, suffixes, etc., to them. They are a category of words that can undertake a quick change in natural languages.

4.2. Close word classes

Close word classes are limited and less detailed, namely determiners, pronouns, modals, prepositions, wh-words, etc. For example, in English, there are only four demonstratives, this, that, these, and those. For modals, the list is long, but they are limited in number. The wh-words belong also to the close word class because they are limited in number. Actually, close classes are highly syntactic and they are difficult to change in natural languages.

5. Wh-Words as a Close Word Class Subsystem

5.1. Introduction

Wh-words belong to the close word classes; that is why it is difficult to think about the structures used with these words. They can occur at the beginning of a sentence as they can function as an object of a preposition. They can also occur as a subject, object, etc.

However, the starting point of any word class should be based on a subsystem. In the case of wh-words as a subsystem, one should find an answer to the question: What does it take the students to learn the wh-words?

To begin with, one needs to identify the six wh-words to be learned, who, what, when, where, why, and how. Hence, what do students need to know about these six words in terms of form, meaning, structure, and usage?

5.2. Form

a. Pronunciation

In terms of pronunciation, one means how the wh-words are uttered. For example, the way "who" is pronounced. The correct pronunciation is expressed with /h/ even if it is introduced by /ʍ/. Hence, "where" is pronounced with /ʍ/ even though it starts with /ʍ/, which may confuse the students. Concerning "who", we notice that it is also aspirated and voiceless. The students should be asked to whisper "where" to practice how it is pronounced. Phonetically, it is transcribed with an inverted /ʍ/. The only way native speakers distinguish between the noun "witch" and the pronoun "which" is by whispering it. Thus, the difference between the two is phonemic. "What" is another wh-word that starts with a voiceless /ʍ/. It is also a rounded back long vowel like in the American words "job" and "not". It is different from the name "Watt", which is pronounced with an "a" as a low unrounded back vowel like in "father". Another difference is that "what" is whispered and voiceless. The "w" in "Watt" is voiced and not whispered. The difference between them is then phonemic, which changes meaning in the English language. Students should know this important element. In terms of accent, in British English, "what" is glotalized at the end. In American English, "what" is stopped at the end like in "What?", echoing something that has been said, and when it is followed by a vowel, the "t" is flapped.

b. Spelling

Another example of form, which is related to wh-words, is their spelling. Learning how to spell them is a skill on its own. It has its own tactics and rules. It is independent from teaching or learning a language. The following examples are some of the linguistic elements we should take into consideration while dealing with wh-words in terms of their spellings:

● *Capitalization*

Capitalization is an element we should add as a part of the form of the wh-words because they usually occur at the beginning of the sentence. Thus, students should learn how to correctly capitalize "H" like in "How" and "W" like in "where", "when", "what", "who", and "why".

● *The placement of "w"*

Students should learn that the "w" in some wh-words is always followed by the "h" (when, where, what, why and who) except in "how".

●*The use of the apostrophe*

The apostrophe is used when the wh-word is followed by the contracted form of the auxiliary verb "to be" in present tense, in the third person singular, like in "What's this?" or "Who's that?".

5.3. Meaning

In terms of meaning, we should build up what we know about the meaning of the wh-words that students need to know. For instance, it is important for them to know that "who" is for person, "where" is for place, "when" is for time, "how" is for manner, "what" is for things and actions, and "why" is for reason. We should state that the pronoun "who" has other forms. It can occur as an object, with the use of "whom", as a possessive pronoun with the use of "whose", the indefinite forms such as whoever, whosoever, whomever, whosever, etc. Wh-words are then more specific because they talk about something that students know, and they are interrogative because they are used to build questions.

5.4. Structure

In terms of structure, we should decipher what we need to learn about the wh-words:

a. *Interrogation:*Wh-words are used for interrogation. With interrogation, they trigger subject/object inversion, except for "who". We say, "Who came yesterday?", where "who" is the subject, and not "who did come yesterday?". With "what", "where", "when", "why", and "how" there is inversion. Hence, inversion is part of the subsystem and that is what students need to know. There is the movement of the wh-word from the canonical position, which is post-auxiliary.

b. *Relative clauses:* Students need to learn that wh-words can be used in relative clauses as in "The man who...", "The thing which ...", "The reason why ...", "The time when ...", and "The place where...". "How" is not used because we do not say, "The way how I do it", but "The way I do it".

c. *Clefts:* Wh-words are used in clefts as a linguistic construction as in, "It is this man who promised me" where the sentence is divided into two parts. Clefts help us put some emphasis on the part we want to expose.

d. *Pseudo-clefts:* Wh-words can be used in pseudo-clefts as in, "What I wanted to say was that …...". In this sentence, we have the relative clause that is headed by the interrogative pronoun "what".

e. *Phatic relative clauses:* Wh-words can be used in phatic relative clauses, as in, "He who does not believe in this story should say it".

5.5. Usage

The usage of wh-words is related to their pragmatic use in linguistics in terms of disciplines such as the phonetic and phonemic representations. Hence, the phonetic representation is more interesting because it shows how sounds influence each other in pronunciation such as the cases of nasalization, flapping, length, stopping, the darkening of the "L", etc.

Therefore, wh-words is a subsystem on its own. It is more practical in its form, meaning, structure, and usage. It is demarkable and can be tested and characterized. It can be taught, learned, and computed as well. It is more functional than the abstract model of Chomsky (1975), the language model of Fodor (1983), and the double articulation of Jakobson (1995).

6. The Corpus Analysis of Wh-Words

Introduction

In their analysis of the acquisition of wh-words, Rowland et al. (2003) predicted through their investigation of literature survey that the interpretation of the order of wh-words is demonstrated according to their syntactic and semantic complexity, and their frequency input. Each wh-word is categorized either as a wh-pronominal, a wh-sentential, or as a wh-adjectival (See also Bloom et al., 1982; Clancy, 1989; Theakston et al., 2001). This order is classified from the easiest (wh-pronominals) to the most complex (wh-adjectivals) in terms of their acquisition and use.

However, the focus in this section will be on the exploration of the two wh-pronominals "what" and "who" as they appear in three novels: "*To the Lighthouse*" by Virginia Woolf (1927), "*Being There*" by Jerzy Kozinski (1996), and "*Nineteen Eighty Four*" by George Orwell (1950). The analysis of the two wh-words in these novels is done in terms of four criteria, form, meaning, structure, and usage.

6.1. Table 1:The exploratory chart of "what" as the only wh-word that appears in "*To the Light House*" by Virginia Woolf.

Wh-word	The sentence	Textual context	Scanning	Linguistics knowledge
What	"What's the use of going now?" he had stormed. **(Part III, Chp1, P137)**	Mr Ramsay was in a rage because when he decided to go to the lighthouse he realised that no one was ready.	-The sentence is initiated by 'what' with a question mark to indicate the interrogative form. -It is about the object of the sentence which is "what". -Old information: we were preparing for this event that everyone was waiting for (visit the lighthouse). -New information: I want to know why no one is ready. -Logical form:"We were all eager to visit the lighthouse. Now, no one of you wants to go. What is the use of going if you are not interested?"	**1. Form:** **a.** Pronunciation: -"What" is pronounced with a voiceless [ʍ], as a back rounded long vowel. -In American English, "what"is aspirated. When it is followed by a word beginning with a vowel, it is flapped. -In British English, the "t" is stopped. **b.** Spelling: -The "w" in "what" is capitalized when it occurs in the initial position. -The "w" in "what" is always followed by "h". -The use of the apostrophe "'s" when it is followed by the auxiliary "to be" as in "what's". **2. Meaning:** -The sentence is interrogative. -Specific: "What" is a specific wh-word. It is used for a specific thing, which is "the use of going now". **3. Structure:** -Distributional: it occurs at the beginning of the sentence. -Canonical position: "What's the use of going now?", "The use of going

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				now is *what*?" -The movement of "what" from its canonical position, which is post-auxiliary. -Inversion: subject-auxiliary inversion. **4. Usage** (The pragmatic use): -Modality: the person who is speaking had stormed, which evokes anger. -The question is rhetorical, meaning that there is no use of going now.
What	"**What** does one send to the Lighthouse?" asked Nancy. (Part III, Chp1, P. 137)	Nancy was disturbed and did not know what to do after Mr Ramsay's reaction. She forced herself to do something.	-The sentence is initiated by ''what'' transforming it into an interrogative question. -It is about things to take to the lighthouse. -It is about the object of the sentence: ''Something we take with us to the lighthouse''. -It is a case of wh-movement where 'what' is an operator, binding an empty variable indicated by'-------' in: ''what does one send to the Lighthouse ---------?'' -Logical form: ''I know that going to the lighthouse requires lot of things we should take with us, but I like to know what they are''. -Old information: Nancy knows she should prepare something to be sent to the lighthouse. -New information: she is asking herself what are these things, how do they look, and what is their use.	**1. Form:** (See the above example) **2. Meaning:** -It is an interrogative sentence. -Specific: "What" is a specific wh-word used for a specific purpose: "the things that are sent to the Lighthouse". **3. Structure:** -Distributional: it occurs initially. -Canonical position: "What does one send to the Lighthouse …?" -Wh-word movement: "what" is an operator that binds an empty variable as in: "what does one send to the Lighthouse -------?" -Inversion: the inversion of the subject and the auxiliary "do" with the main verb "send". **4. Usage** (The pragmatic use): -Modality: the person who is speaking was asking this question in an angry mood.

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6.2. Table 2: The exploratory chart of the wh-words "who" and "what" as they appear in "*Being There*" by Jerzy Kozinski.

Wh-word	The sentence	Textualcontext	Scanning	Linguisticsknowledge
Who	**Who'sWho**? (Chp5, p75)	When the President of the United States discovered that none of his followers knows anything about Chance.	-"who" is heading the sentence to indicate itsinterrogative form. -The first "who" is about human, animate, and it is specific. -Semantically, the second "who" is an unknown object of the first "who" (the subject). -The question is about the object of the sentence. -Old information is about the second "who". -Nnew information: there is someone, an unknown person, whom we would like to identify.	**1. Form:** **a.** pronunciation: -"who" is aspirated and voiceless. -"W" of "who" is not pronounced. -The phonetic transcription of "who": ▪British English: /huː/. ▪American English: the phonetic spelling is /ˈhu/. **b.** spelling: -"Who" is heading the sentence. -The first letter of "who" is capitalized. **2. Meaning:** -"Who's who?" is an interrogative sentence. -Specific: "Who" is a specific pronoun used for a specific purpose. **3. Structure:** -Distributional: it occurs in the initialposition. -The first "who" is the subject pronoun of the auxiliary. -The second "who" is the object pronoun of the sentence. -There is a wh-word movement. -Inversion: no inversion with the use of "who". **4. Usage** (The pragmatic use): -Modality: the person who is speaking was asking this question in a disturbing mood.
Who	**Who** can?(Chp.5 p. 79)	When Chance was asked to write a book and answered that, he cannot write because he is illiterate. They just thought he meant he has no time for writing.	-"Who" is placed in the initial position. -The question is about the subject of the sentence and it is formed by putting "who" in the subject position. -Thequestion is incomplete, showing an elliptic phenomenon that we can interpret. -It is about proximity principle. "Can", as an inflection (aux), must take a VP as a complement, and can	**1. Form:** (See the previous example). **2. Meaning:** -"Who can?" is an interrogative sentence. -"Who" is in the subject position. -Specific: "Who" is a specific pronoun used for a specific purpose. -"Who can?" is an incomplete sentence. **3. Structure:** -Distributional: "who" occurs initially. -The canonical position of "who": "Who can ----?" -We havewh-word movement.

			have only a verb as a head. -"Who" is about human, animate, and it is specific. -Semantically, the unknown part is the variable, the element of the clause, which is not revealed. -The full sentence could be: "Who can do it?" with no inversion. -Old information: some people can do the act of writing. -New information: we want to know who they are.	-Inversion: no inversion with "who". **4. Usage** (The pragmatic use): -Modality: the person who is speaking was asking this question rhetorically.
What	Miss Hayes interrupted ,"**what** are your plans now?" (Chp2, p.23-24)	He was asked after all, what he is supposed to do concerning his vague situation (no ID, no papers, no bills).	-She is asking about the plans he has. -"What" is an operator, binding an empty variable indicated by "-----" in: "what are your plans now ---?" -"What" determines the interrogative interpretation of the clause as an interrogative clause. -Old information: "I know that you have plans". -New information: the types of plans that you have now. -Logical form: "You have some plans. My question is 'what is their nature?'"	**1. Form:** **a.** pronunciation: -"what" is voiceless. -"W" of "what" is not pronounced. -The phonetic transcription of "what": ▪British English: /wɒt/. ▪American English: the phonetic spelling is /wʌt/. **b.** spelling: -"What" occurs initially. - Capitalization of the first letter of "what". **2. Meaning:** -"**What** are your plans now?" is an interrogative sentence. -Specific: "what" is a specific pronoun used to ask for specific information. **3. Structure:** -Distributional: "what" occurs at the beginning of the sentence. -"What" is the subject pronoun of the auxiliary. -We havewh-word movement. - Inversion: inversion of the subject and the auxiliary "are". **4. Usage** (The pragmatic use): -Modality: the person who is speaking was asking this question rhetorically because he knows there are no plans.
What	"**What** do you think	When the President	-The sentence is introduced by "what",	**1. Form:**

	about the bad season on The Street?" (Chp.4 p. 45)	asked him his opinion about the crisis in Wall Street.	transforming it into an interrogative question. -The term "what" is the object. -The question is about the object of the sentence: "your opinion about the bad season on The Street". -We have wh-movement where "what" is an operator, binding an empty variable indicated as "-------" in: "What do you think about the bad season on The Street-------?" -Old information: there is a bad crisis in The Wall Street. -New information: Gardiner's opinion about it.	(See the previous examples) **2. Meaning:** -The sentence is interrogative. -Specific: "What" is a specific pronoun used for a specific purpose, which is the opinion of Chance. **3. Structure:** -Distributional: "what" occurs initially. -The canonical position of "what": "What do you think about the bad season on The Street?" "Chance's opinion about the bad season is what?" -Wh-word movement: "what" is an operator that binds an empty variable as in: "what do you think about the bad season on The Street -------?" -Inversion: inversion of the subject and the auxiliary "do" with the verb "think". **4. Usage** (The pragmatic use): -Modality: the person who is speaking was asking this question to get some information.

6.3. Table 3: The exploratory chart of the wh-words "who" and "what" as they appear in "*Nineteen Eighty Four*" by George Orwell.

Wh-word	The sentence	Textual context	Scanning	Linguistics knowledge
Who	"Who taught you that?" he said. (Part II, Chp. 4, p.120)	When Winston was surprized that Julia almost memorized the old rhyme Mr Charrington had taught him.	-The sentence is initiated by "who" to indicate the interrogative form. -The question is about the subject of the sentence "who". -Textual context: the interpretation of the sentence says that Julia is acquainted with the old rhyme, which means that she learned them at an early age by someone. -Old information: there are some people who taught you this. -New information: who these people are if they exist because The Party forbids using such rhyme.	**1. Form:** **a.** pronunciation: -"who" is aspirated and voiceless. -"W" in "who" is not pronounced. -The phonetic transcription of "who": ▪British English: /hu:/. ▪American English: /ˈhu/. **b.** spelling: -"Who" is in the initial position. -"W" is capitalized. **2. Meaning:** -"Who taught you that?" is an interrogative sentence. -Specificity: "Who" is used for a specific purpose. **3. Structure:** -Distributional: "who" appears in the position of the subject. -We have wh-word movement. -Inversion: no inversion with

				"who". **4. Usage** (The pragmatic use): -Modality: the person who is speaking was asking this question surprisingly.
Who	"Who denounced you?" said Winston. (Part III, Chp1, p187)	Winston was surprised that Parsons was arrested and wanted to know who denounced him. (His daughter did).	-The sentence is initiated by "who". -It is about the subject of the sentence, which is "who". -Textual context: the sentence says that there must be someone who denounced you, but who is this person? Perhaps you know who might be. -Old information: some people surely denounced you. -New information: I want to know who they are.	**1. Form:** See the previous examples. **2. Meaning:** -"Who denounced you?" is an interrogative sentence. -Specificity: "who" is used for a specific purpose. **3. Structure:** -Distributional:"who" appears in the initial position in the position of the subject. -There is a wh-word movement. - Inversion: no inversion is usedwith "who". **4. Usage** (The pragmatic use): -Modality: Winston is wondering who denounced him.
What	"**What** lessons do we learn from this fact, comrades?" asked Winston. (Part I Chp. 4 P. 41)	Winston asking sarcastic questions and answering them by imitating Big Brother.	-This sentence is initiated by "what", which indicates its interrogative form, with an inversion of the auxiliary and the subject. -The main verb is "learn". -It is about the object of the sentence. -It is a case of wh-movement where "what" is an operator, binding an empty variable indicated by "------" in: "**What** lessons do we learn from this fact, comrades --------?" -Old information: there are some lessons. -New information: Winston wants to know what these lessons are. -"What" is an operator that determines the interrogative interpretation of the clause as an interrogative clause.	**1. Form:** **a.** pronunciation: -"What" is voiceless. -"W" in "what" is not pronounced. -The phonetic transcription: ▪British English: /wɒt/. ▪American English: /wʌt/. **b.** spelling: -"What" comes in the initial position. -The first letter of "what" is capitalized. **2. Meaning:** -The sentence is interrogative. -Specific: "What" is a specific wh-word used for a specific purpose, which is "the learned lessons from the fact". **3. Structure:** -Distributional: "What" is heading the sentence. -Canonical position: "What lessons do we learn from this fact, comrades ------?" "The lessons we learn from this fact is *what*?" -The movement of "what" from its canonical position, which is

| What | "**What** need is there for a word like "bad"?" said Syme. (Part I, Chp5, p44) | When Syme was explaining the kind of words that must be destroyed: to use "ungood" as an exact opposite of "good". | -"What" comes at the beginning of the sentence transforming it into an interrogative question.
-"what" is about specific things. It is about the uselessness of some words like the word "bad".
-The question is about the object of the sentence.
-Logical form: "I know that there are some words like "bad", as a Party, we destroy them because they denote something negative".
-Old information: words like "bad" exist for a certain use.
-New information: these words will not exist anymore. | post-auxiliary.
4. Usage (The pragmatic use):
-Modality: the person who is speaking is asking a sarcastic question, which evokes his inner mood.
-The question is rhetorical because he knows we can deduce lot of questions from this fact.

1. Form:
See the previous examples.
2. Meaning:
-The sentence is interrogative.
- Specificity: "what" is a specific pronoun used for a specific purpose, which is the "need of the word "bad"".
3. Structure:
-Distributional:"what" occurs initially.
-Canonical position: "**What** need is there for a word like "bad"?": "The need for a word like "bad" is *what*?"
4. Usage (The pragmatic use):
-Modality: the person who is speaking was asking this question to get some information. |

7. Conclusion

This corpus analysis focuses on two wh-words as a linguistic sub-system, namely the two wh-pronominals *who* and *what* as they occur in the three novels (Tables 1, 2, and 3). We extracted only those wh-questions in which we have explicit conversations between the characters.

Table 4: The number of wh-words "who" and "what" used in the corpus analysis

N°	The novels	Name of the author	Number of wh-words		Observation
			who	what	
1	To the Lighthouse	Virginia Woolf	0	2	There is very little conversation
2	Being There	Jerzy Kozinski	5	23	…………………
3	Nineteen Eighty Four	George Orwell	4	52	…………………
	Totals	………………	**9**	**95**	…………………

According to the statistics in table 4, we deduce that the use of the questions based on the wh-word *what* is higher than the ones in which *who* appears. In *To the Lighthouse*, the wh-word *who* is not used at all because the monologue aspect of Wolf's writing style adopts the stream-of-consciousness as a narrative technique. However, our analysis is basically conducted in terms of the linguistic knowledge namely, (1) the form with the pronunciation and spelling of the terms, (2) the meaning, with its specificity, (3) the structure, with the distribution and movement of each wh-term, and (4) their pragmatic use and modality.

The textual context and the scanning of the sentences in which these two wh-terms occur introduces us to the exploration of these sentences, their semantic field, and the related old and new information, which they evoke.

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