PS #1: Sluicing, how languages vary, and what this teaches us [rev. 2]

The English examples in (1) show a rule of syntax that we discussed informally in class, called *wh*-movement. The bracketed phrases *what he bought* and *who bought it* function as the direct object of *know* and are called "embedded questions". Wh-movement is happening inside the embedded questions:

(1)  a. John bought something, but I don't know [what he bought __].
    b. Someone bought the painting, but I don't know [who __ bought it].

Consider now the examples in (2). These sentences have the same meaning as the corresponding examples in (1) but seem to have only a *wh*-word as the direct object of *know*. The phenomenon seen in (2) goes by the somewhat bizarre name of Sluicing.

(2)  a. John bought something, but I don't know [what].
    b. Someone bought the painting, but I don't know [who].

Clearly, in some sense, the bracketed portions of (2) do the same "job" as the fuller forms in (1). But how does this work, exactly? Consider two possibilities:

Possibility 1: The "ellipsis" hypothesis

- A "sluiced" expression like the bracketed portions of (2a-b) is a full clause (i.e. an embedded question) in which *wh*-movement has occurred.
- After *wh*-movement happens, an optional process of ellipsis applies. Ellipsis is a deletion rule that eliminates a specific portion of the clause, leaving only the remainder of the clause pronounced.
- Ellipsis of a phrase X is possible only if X is identical to a phrase found elsewhere in the sentence or discourse (its "antecedent") — except for the replacement of words like *someone* in the antecedent with *wh*-words like *what*.
- If this possibility is on the right track, the bracketed portion of (2a) has exactly the same syntax as the bracketed portion of (1a), except that ellipsis has gotten rid of everything except the moved *wh*-phrase *what*: e.g. ...but I don't know [what he bought __].

Possibility 2: The "what you see is what you get" hypothesis

- A sluiced expression like the bracketed portions of (2a-b) is not a full clause in which *wh*-movement has occurred. It is just a simple *wh*-phrase that happens to function as the direct object of *know*. What you see is what you get.
- The semantic component of language assigns a meaning to a *wh*-phrase in this construction which is similar to the meaning of an embedded question like *what John bought*, but arises from a very different syntax.

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1 Sluticing doesn't actually require the specific words *someone* or *something*. Other "indefinite" phrases like *a certain book* are also fine — but let's ignore that here.

2 *Kem* is a form of *kto* used with certain prepositions. Likewise *čem* is a form of *čto* used with certain (other) prepositions. None of the starred sentences improve if a different form of *kto* or *čto* is used.
Russian has Sluicing, as shown in (9):

(9) a. Ivan kupil čto-to, no ja ne znaju čto on kupil __.
   Ivan bought something but I not know what he bought.
   'Ivan bought something, but I don't know what he bought.'

b. Ivan kupil čto-to, no ja ne znaju čto.
   'Ivan bought something, but I don't know what.'

Consider now a striking contrast between English Sluicing and Russian Sluicing. This contrast argues for one of the two possible analyses of Sluicing over the other. **State the argument carefully, making explicit reference to the examples.**

(10) a. Mary was talking about something, but I don't know about what.
   b. Mary was talking about something, but I don't know what.

(11) a. Maša govorila o čem-to, no ja ne znaju o čem.
    b. *Maša govorila o čem-to, no ja ne znaju čem.

(12) a. Mary was talking with someone, but I don't know with whom.
    b. Mary was talking with someone, but I don't know who.\(^3\)

(13) a. Maša govorila s kem-to, no ja ne znaju s kem.
    b. *Maša govorila s kem-to, no ja ne znaju kem.

**Question 3:**
Here are some facts from a variety of languages (and there's many more where these came from — a monograph by Jason Merchant with data from scads of languages) that should strengthen the argument you made in answer to Question 2. Explain!

**Basque**

(14) a. *Nor ekin hitzegin zuen ___?
   who with talk-to AUX
   'Who did he talk with?'

b. *Nor hitzegin zuen ___ ekin.

(15) a. Ana-k norbait ekin hitzegin zuen, baina ez dakit nor ekin.
   Ana-ERG\(^4\) someone with talk.to AUX but not know who with
   'Ana spoke to someone, but I don't know whom.'

b. *Ana-k norbait ekin hitzegin zuen, baina ez dakit nor.

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\(^3\) Do not worry about *who* vs. *whom*, which is largely (though not entirely) a matter of prescriptive grammar.

\(^4\) ERG='ergative', a suffix that indicates that *Ana* is the subject of a sentence (that also contains a direct object).