Wh-questions’ interveners: Anti-Topic Items?

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Intervention Effects

Definition

The phenomenon by which in a genuine wh-question an item from the following list cannot precede a wh-phrase in situ without rendering the question “deviant”:

(1) “Interveners”:

- Negative polarity items (*anyone, anything* etc)
- Quantificational NPs (*all NP, every NP, some NP* etc)
- Adverbial quantifiers (*always, often, sometimes* etc)
- Focused items (with or without a focusing particle such as *also, even, only*)
- Nominative-marked subjects
- Negation
- Modal adverbs (*certainly, possibly, probably* etc)
(2) French

a. Qu’est-ce que seule Dorothée mange ?
what-is-it that only Dorothée eats
‘What does only Dorothée eat’

b. #Seule Dorothée mange quoi ?
only Dorothée eats what
a. ‘*What does only Dorothée eat?’
b. ‘Only Dorothée eats WHAT?’ (echo)
Intervention effects

Definition

(3) Korean

a. Nwukwu-lul [Mira-ka]_{Focus} chotayha-ess-ni?
   who-Acc Mira-Nom invite-Past-Q
   ‘Who did [Mira]_{Focus} invite?’

b. # [Mira-ka]_{Focus} nwukwu-lul chotayha-ess-ni?
   Mira-Nom who-Acc invite-Past-Q
   a. ‘*Who did [Mira]_{Focus} invite?’
   b. ‘Is it Mira that invited someone?’
Intervention effects

Definition

(4) Japanese

a. Nani-o dareka-ga yonda-no?
   what.Acc someone-Nom lire-Past-Q
   ‘What did someone read?’

b. #Dareka-ga nani-o yonda-no?
   Someone-Nom what.Acc read-Past-Q
   ‘What did someone read?’ (“sounds like an echo question”)
Intervention effects

Definition

(5) ‘Partial wh-movement’ (Beck, 1996)
   a. Wen glaubt niemand daß Karl gesehen hat?
      whom believe nobody that Karl seen has
      ‘Who does nobody believe that Karl saw?’
   b. ??Was glaubt niemand wen Karl gesehen hat?
      what believes nobody whom Karl seen has
      ‘#Who does nobody believe that Karl saw?’

(6) ‘Multiple wh-questions’
   a. Wer hat wo niemandem angetroffen?
      who has where nobody met
      ‘Who didn’t meet anybody where?’
   b. ??Wer hat niemanden wo angetroffen?
      who has nobody where met
      ‘#Who didn’t meet anybody where?’
Introduction
Research questions

1. What is the property that makes all the interveners into one natural class?

2. Why does the wh-phrase have to be fronted for the question to be well formed in a set of languages that otherwise exhibit wh-in-situ?

3. Why do quantificational adverbs and a subset of quantificational items act as interveners in French and not in Korean and Japanese?

4. Why do (non-quantificational) nominative subjects act as interveners in Japanese and not in Korean?
Intervention effects
Previous approaches

According to Beck (1996); Beck and Kim (1997); Hagstrom (1998); Pesetsky (2000); Kim (2002, 2006); Beck (2006) (among others), intervention effects are a universal phenomenon and they result from the interference of the intervener between the $wh$-phrase and a syntactic position or a semantic operator within the left periphery of the clause.
Intervention effects

Previous approaches

Tomioka (2007a) points out several problematic facts for these analyses:

- Subtlety of grammatical judgments and variation among native speakers
- Variation among the interveners
- Weakening of intervention effect in (some) embedded contexts
- The difficulty to make all the interveners into one natural class
Tomioka (2007a,b) proposes an account of this phenomenon that questions the very idea of “intervention” effects: intervention effects are “derived from a less than perfect correspondence between syntactic and information structure.”
Korean and Japanese intervention effects

Tomioka’s pragmatic approach

What the expressions responsible for intervention effects have in common is their inability to serve as a topic: they cannot bear the topic markers {-wa} in Japanese and {-nun} in Korean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Korean</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anyone-top</td>
<td>*daremo-wa</td>
<td>*amuto-nun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone-top</td>
<td>*daremo-wa</td>
<td>*nwukwunka-nun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone-top</td>
<td>*dareka-wa</td>
<td>*nwukwunka-nun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John or Bill -top</td>
<td>*[John-ka Bill]-wa</td>
<td>*[John-ina Bill]-un</td>
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Korean and Japanese Intervention effects

Tomioka’s pragmatic approach

To account for the fact that a wh-question is deviant when the intervener precedes the wh-phrase but well-formed when the intervener follows it, this author explicitly takes a stand sometimes implicitly taken in studies on wh-questions, namely, that the wh-phrase always acts as the focus and, most importantly, that the non-wh portion is always given in the sense of Prince (1981) or Schwarzschild (1999).

(7) What did John read?

(7) “can be uttered only in the situation where the proposition ‘John read x’ is salient” (Tomioka, 2007b, 1575)

→ For a wh-question to be well formed, all the non-wh items must be marked as given.
Korean and Japanese intervention effects
Tomioka’s pragmatic approach

There are two ways in Japanese for an item within the wh-question to be marked as given: either by carrying topic marking or by being included in the intonationally reduced part of the question that follows the wh-phrase, as in Japanese the post-wh part of the question is always intonationally reduced (see Deguchi and Kitagawa (2002); Ishihara (2002, 2003))

He uses the reciprocal to the DESTRESS-GIVEN constraint.
As an anti-topic item cannot be morphologically marked as given through topic-marking, it thus fails to be marked as given when it precedes the wh-phrase. The only way for the wh-question to be well formed is for that item to be marked as given through prosodic means.

→ Japanese wh-scrambling (and probably Korean wh-scrambling as well) cancels intervention effects by placing the “anti-topic item” within the intonationally reduced part of the wh-question and by thus ensuring that it is correctly interpreted as given.
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

1. Tomioka’s generalization according to which \textit{wh}-scrambling/\textit{wh}-fronting is meant to ensure that an intervener is correctly interpreted as given is not borne out.

2. The property that makes all interveners into one natural class is their non-given nature and not their anti-topicality.

3. Any non-given item sitting in the highest A-specifier position prevents the head of the intonation phrase associated with the \textit{wh}-phrase from being aligned with the left edge of this prosodic constituent. Japanese and Korean \textit{wh}-scrambling are thus prosodically motivated: they create an optimal prosodic structure.

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Wh-questions' interveners: Anti-Topic Items?
How does French wh-questions and wh-phrases compare with Korean and Japanese wh-questions and wh-phrases?
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

French exhibits *wh*-questions with fronted *wh*-phrases as well as *wh*-questions with *wh*-phrases in situ in genuine requests for information.

(8) a. Qu’est-ce que vous pensez du contrat?  
   *what-is-it that you think of-the contract*  
   ‘What do you think of the contract?’

   b. Vous en pensez quoi du contrat?  
   *you of-it think what of-the contract*  
   ‘What do you think of the contract?’

(9) a. Comment vous étiez habillée?  
   *how you were dressed*  
   ‘How were you dressed?’

   b. Vous étiez habillée comment?  
   *How were you dressed*?  
   ‘How were you dressed?’
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

French *wh*-phrases are however distinct from their Japanese and Korean counterparts in that they do not share the same morphological proximity with *wh*-indefinites.

(10) nwu(kwu)-ka pakkey w-ass-ni?
who/someone-nom outside come-past-Q
a. ‘Is there someone at the door?’
b. ‘Who is at the door?’

(11) a. Est-ce qu’il y a quelqu’un à la porte?
is-it that-it there has someone at the door
‘Is there someone at the door?’
b. Qui est-ce qui est à la porte?
who is-it that is at the door?
‘Who is at the door?’
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

(10) nwu(kwu)-ka pakkey w-ass-ni?
who/someone-nom outside come-past-Q
a. ‘Is there someone at the door?’
b. ‘Who is at the door?’

In (10) (Choe, 1995), the wh-phrase *nwu(kwu)* is ambiguous between an interrogative and an indefinite reading and it is only interpreted as interrogative when associated with sentence stress. In Korean wh-questions, prosody consequently fulfills a semantic purpose: it determines whether the question is a *yes/no* question with an indefinite or a wh-question.
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

(12) a. Est-ce qu’il y a quelqu’un à la porte?
   is-it that-it there has someone at the door
   ‘Is there someone at the door?’

b. Qui est-ce qui est à la porte?
   who is-it that is at the door?
   ‘Who is at the door?’

There is no need for prosody to play such a role in French questions as *quelqu’un* can only be interpreted as ‘someone’ and (initial) *qui* as ‘who’. Whereas Japanese and Korean interrogative *wh*-phrases always carry sentence stress, French *wh*-phrases only carry it in *wh*-in situ questions, as indicated in (8) and (9).
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

(8) a. Qu’est-ce que vous pensez du contrat?
what-is-it that you think of-the contact
‘What do you think of the contract?’

b. Vous en pensez quoi du contrat?
you of-it think what of-the contract
‘What do you think of the contract?’

When the wh-question contains no intervener, one can ask what
the linguistic factors are that determine the choice between the two
types of wh-structure illustrated in (8).
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

Boeckx (1999); Cheng and Rooryck (2000); Zubizarreta (2003) (among others) have argued that French *wh*-in situ and *wh*-fronted questions vary from a semantic perspective, that is, with respect to their answerhood conditions. According to them, *wh*-in situ questions are associated with a semantic presupposition and require an exhaustive answer.
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

Based on data from the variety of French spoken in the Paris metropolitan area, Hamlaoui (2009) argues that the two types of questions are equivalent from a semantic perspective but vary with respect to their information packaging: in French, \textit{wh}-in situ questions emerge only when the denotation of the expressions constituting the non-\textit{wh} portion is given.

There are three ways for a denotation to belong to the immediate common ground (Tancredi, 1992; Krifka, 2007):

- by being present in the previous discourse context,
- by being situationally given,
- by being pragmatically inferred through conversational implicatures.
As given items must be destressed (Schwarzschild, 1999; Féry and Samek-Lodovici, 2006), the wh-phrase is in this case the only item that can carry sentence stress.

Instead of fronting the wh-phrase and destressing the given items that follow it, French ensures that the wh-phrase is aligned with the right-edge of the intonation phrase by not fronting it and, whenever possible, right dislocating all the items that could separate it from the right edge of the intonational phrase.

(13) Vous en pensez quoi du contrat?

‘What do you think of the contract?’
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

→ French *wh*-fronting is a “focus widening device”: it only occurs when the focus of the clause is larger than the *wh*-phrase – in other words, when there is an item other than the *wh*-phrase that can carry sentence stress due to its non-given discourse status.

As interveners are non-given items and are thus eligible to realize sentence stress, whenever one appears within the non-*wh* part of the *wh*-question, the *wh*-phrase is free to be fronted.
Intervention effects from a French point of view
An alternative pragmatic approach

This account of \textit{wh}-questions goes against Tomioka’s premise that the non-\textit{wh} portion has to be given for a \textit{wh}-question to be well formed.

The fact that – at least in some languages – \textit{wh}-questions are similar to declaratives in that they are subject to the same contextual appropriateness requirement(s) has also been observed in Hindi-Urdu (Kidwai, 1999, 232): moving the \textit{wh}-phrase to the preverbal focus position is not obligatory when a question is discourse initial, that is, when the non-\textit{wh} part is new. Engdahl (2006) notes that English resorts to prosodic means to express the discourse-given status of the non-\textit{wh} portion.
Are Japanese and Korean \textit{wh}-scrambling meant to ensure that interveners are correctly interpreted as given?

Unless Korean and Japanese intervention effects are a distinct phenomenon from French intervention effects – a fact that has not so far been proven – Tomioka’s proposal makes the wrong prediction that in French, a \textit{wh}-question in which an intervenener precedes a \textit{wh}-phrase in situ should be well formed as a genuine request for information, but it is not the case.
Intervention effects
Interveners are non-given items

Tomioka’s proposal that interveners are anti-topic items accounts for a larger set of interveners than previous studies, as recent studies on intervention effects have tended to concentrate on a “core set” of interveners, namely focused items with or without a focusing particle (Beck, 2006; Kim, 2002, 2006).
Intervention effects

Interveners are non-given items

French however shows that stating that interveners are anti-topic items is too strong a statement. For instance, tensed verbs and subject clitics typically resist topic marking and can thus be considered to be anti-topic items. As French is an SVO language, subject clitics and tensed verbs typically precede in situ *wh*-phrases. They however do not make the *wh*-question deviant, contrary to the items in (1).

(14) Tu manges quoi?
you eat what?
‘What do you eat?’

(15) Il va où?
he goes where
‘Where is he going?’
I propose that the property that is common to all the items listed in (1) is their *non-given* nature.

→ The generalization that seems to hold for French, Korean and Japanese is that *wh*-phrases can only occur in situ if they are preceded by given items (within the limits of the lowest segment of the largest extended projection of the verb)
Intervention effects
Interveners are non-given items

I propose to distinguish two categories of interveners: those that are focused and those that, in absence of focus, still act as new or “non-given” elements.

- 1st category: free foci, constituents in the scope of a focusing particle and NPIs (Krifka, 1995; Kim, 2002; Beck, 2006)
- 2nd category: adverbial quantifiers, nominal quantifiers, modal adverbs, negation
First, what adverbial and nominal quantifiers as well as modal adverbs have in common is their membership to a closed set of items organized along a Horn scale (Horn, 1972):

- \(\{all, \text{ most, many, some}\}\)
- \(\{\text{none, hardly any, few}\}\)
- \(\{\text{always, often, sometimes}\}\)
- \(\{\text{never, rarely}\}\)
- \(\{\text{certainly, probably, possibly}\}\).
Intervention effects
Interveners are non-given items

→ By choosing one of these items in order to express her informational needs, the speaker discards the other items of the same scale/excludes other alternatives. This is reminiscent of focusing.
In French, adverbial and nominal quantifiers and modal adverbs are just like *wh*-phrases in that they do not attract sentence stress when surrounded by discourse-new items, but it seems that they cannot be destressed.
Their lack of referentiality is likely to be partly responsible for the fact that the above cited quantificational expressions do not act as topics. The quantificational expressions such as *subete-no-/zembu-no-NP*, *motun-NP* ‘all (the) NP’ and *hotondo-no-NP*, *taypwupwun-uy-NP* ‘most NP’, which can be topicalized, are those that tend to act as definite plurals and are thus referential. The (un)ability to be topicalized however does not in itself account for why an item is or is not an intervener.
Intervention effects

Interveners are non-given items

Indefinite expressions like *a student*, *some student* or *someone* typically introduce new referents, which is consistent with the idea that interveners are intrinsically non-given items.
Intervention effects

Interim summary

1. Review of the proposal according to which interveners are Anti-Topic Items
2. When checked against French intervention effects, the proposal is not borne out
3. Alternative proposal: interveners are Anti-Given Items

Let's go back to Japanese and Korean

1. How to account for the fact that nominative subjects are interveners in Japanese and Korean?
2. How to account for the fact that adverbial quantifiers are not interveners in these languages?
3. What is the aim of wh-scrambling in Korean and Japanese?
Intervention effects
Back to Japanese and Korean

In Japanese and Korean, a *wh*-question in which an intervener precedes the *wh*-phrase is deviant due to the intervener preventing the head of the intonation phrase from simultaneously being leftmost within the intonation phrase and realized by the *wh*-phrase. *Wh*-scrambling solves this issue by creating a configuration in which the *wh*-phrase is correctly aligned with the left edge of the intonational phrase.
Let us start with the following generalization made by Tomioka (2007b, 1583) with respect to Japanese nominative-marking:

“nominative subjects are interpreted as [part of the] focus by virtue of not being marked for topic”.

→ This generalization is consistent with my proposal that the property that makes all the interveners into one natural class is their non-given nature.
Intervention effects

Except for NPIs and focused constituents, all the items that Tomioka claims function as interveners in Japanese do carry nominative marking, as illustrated below.

(16) #Daremo-ga nani-o yon-da-no?
    everyone-nom what-acc read-past-Q
    ‘What did everyone read?’

(17) #Dareka-ga nani-o yon-da-no?
    someone-nom what-acc read-past-Q
    ‘What did someone read?’

(18) #[John-ka Bill]-ga nani-o yon-da-no?
    John-or Bill-nom what-acc read-past-Q
    ‘What did John or Bill read?’ (Tomioka, 2007b, 1571)
What is important here is not so much the fact that the items that act as interveners cannot carry topic marking, but that they carry morphological marking that indicates (i) that they are not given and (ii) that they sit in the highest A-specifier of the extended projection of the verb (CP/TP/vP).

Assuming that the left edge of the syntactic clause is mapped onto the left-edge of an intonation phrase (Selkirk, 2005; Truckenbrodt, 2005), from a prosodic perspective these items are consequently aligned with the left edge of the intonation phrase.
Topicalized DPs are usually assumed to be located higher in the syntactic structure and their prosodic realization indicates that they are phrased separately (Poser, 1984). The quantificational NPs that do not act as interveners are those that can be topicalized and act as definite plurals (referential Qtfed NPs).

When sentence initial, adverbial quantifiers are adjoined to the extended projection of the verb, they are outside the syntactic clause that is mapped onto an intonation phrase (they do not prevent the wh-phrase from being aligned with the left edge of the intonation phrase).
Intervention effects

Japanese, summary

1. Nominative subject are interpreted as focused → non-given
2. Referential Qtfed NPs that do not act as interveners are topicalized → outside the lowest IntP
3. Sentence initial Quantificational adverbs are adjoined to the main syntactic clause → outside the lowest IntP

2 and 3 also hold in Korean
According to Kim’s (2002; 2006) data, a nominative-marked subject does not act as an intervener unless it is clearly focused, that is, if it carries sentence stress.

(19) \([\text{Mira-ka}]_{\text{Focus}} \text{nwukwu-lul chotayha-ess-ni?}\)
Mira-nom who-acc invite-Past-Q

a. ‘*Who did [Mira]_{\text{Focus}} invite?’
b. ‘Is it Mira that invited someone?’

(20) \([\text{Mira-ka}] \text{nwukwu-lul chotayha-ess-ni?}\)
Mira-nom who-acc invite-Past-Q

‘Who did Mira invite?’
According to Yoon (2004), Korean speakers allow nominative-NPs to be interpreted as “topics”, particularly when they precede a nominative *wh*-phrase, such as in (21).

(21) Pihayngki-ka etten kicong-i  ceyil khu-ni?  
Airplane-nom which model-nom most big-Q  
‘Among airplanes (Topic), which model is the largest?’

Further investigations are needed to determine whether nominative-marked NPs are also interpreted as “topics” in questions such as the one in (20) and whether such *wh*-questions can be discourse initial. This would help determining whether what Yoon calls a nominative-marked “topic” should rather be treated as a discourse-given (or “anaphoric”) subject-NP.
Intervention effects in Korean and Japanese
Wh-scrambling has a prosodic motivation

Studies by Jun (1996) and Büring (2009) suggest that in declarative sentences, Korean focused items tend to realize the head of the intonation phrase.

In this language, focused items create a deviant *wh*-question when they precede a *wh*-phrase in situ because being closer to the left edge of the intonational phrase makes them a better candidate than the *wh*-phrase to realize the head of this prosodic constituent, that is, sentence stress.

In order for a *wh*-phrase to be interpreted as interrogative, it has to realize sentence stress, otherwise the *wh*-question is interpreted as a *yes/no* question. This is exactly what happens when a focused item precedes the *wh*-phrase, because the former deprives the latter of sentence stress.
Conclusion

What is the property that makes all the interveners into one natural class? → their anti-given status
Why does the wh-phrase have to be fronted for the question to be well formed in a set of languages that otherwise exhibit wh-in-situ? → It depends on the language.

In Korean and Japanese, it is in order to align the head of the intonation phrase realized by the wh-phrase with the left-edge of this prosodic constituent.

In French, sentence stress must be aligned with the right-edge of the intonation phrase and wh-fronting is the default option (contrary to Japanese and Korean, there is no requirement in French for the wh-phrase to always carry sentence stress). Wh-fronting is only prevented when no other item than the wh-phrase can carry sentence stress. When a non-given item sits in the non-wh portion of the question, there is simply no reason for the wh-phrase to stay in situ.
Why do quantificational adverbs and a subset of quantificational items act as interveners in French and not in Korean and Japanese? → In Korean and in Japanese, these items do not act as interveners because, being adjoined to the largest extended projection of the verb, they are located outside the intonation phrase whose left-edge the wh-phrase must be aligned with in order to create an optimal prosodic structure.
Conclusion

Why do (non-quantificational) nominative subjects act as interveners in Japanese and not in Korean? → Japanese nominative-subjects are interpreted as non-given (focused/new) and they sit leftmost within the syntactic clause that is mapped onto an intonation phrase and whose left-edge the wh-phrase must be aligned with in order to create an optimal prosodic structure. They prevent the wh-phrase carrying sentence stress from being leftmost within the intonation phrase to which it belongs. Korean nominative subjects do not share this property of a default non-given interpretation. It seems that they can be interpreted as given. When they precede the wh-phrase in situ, they do not compete with the wh-phrase for sentence stress because they are not eligible to carry it due to their information structural status.
Intervention effects in French, Korean and Japanese

General summary

- In French, there is no “intervention” effect per se.
- In Japanese and Korean, the intervention is prosodic in nature and wh-scrambling is an instance of prosodically motivated movement.


