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How why is different: wh-in-situ in Krachi

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Several varieties of wh-in-situ have been documented. One type is found in multiple questions in languages like English, where one wh-expression moves and the other remains in-situ. A second variety is found in languages like Chinese and Japanese, where wh-in-situ is not limited to multiple questions. Languages that employ this strategy often have dedicated interrogative particles. There is also a third variety, where the option to move or freeze the interrogative exists outside the domain of multiple questions and no overt question particle appears in the clause. French has been reported to belong to this class, and Krachi, a Kwa language of Ghana, clearly employs this strategy. As illustrated below, in Krachi, a wh-expression may either appear in-situ or in a left-peripheral position. When moved, the constituent accompanies the focus marker ji, which is also found outside interrogative clauses.

(1) a. ǝtʃiw ɛ-mò bwatéo momo?
    woman 3SG.sg-kill.PST chicken which
   ‘Which chicken did the woman kill?’
   b. Bwatéo momo jí ǝtʃiś ɛ-mò?
    chicken which FOC woman 3SG.sg-kill.PST
   ‘Which chicken did the woman kill?’

   In Krachi, there is a striking asymmetry with respect to the merge possibilities of wh- constituents. Unlike all other interrogatives in the language, why may not appear in-situ. It must surface pre-verbally in a left-peripheral focus position.

(2) a. N̩̩se ɛ-mò bwatéo?
    who 3SG.sg-kill.PST chicken
   ‘Who killed the chicken?’
   b. ǝtʃiś ɛ-mò ne?
    woman 3SG.sg-kill.PST what
   ‘What did the woman kill?’
   c. ǝtʃiś ɛ-mò bwatéo nene?
    woman 3SG.sg-kill.PST chicken how
   ‘How did the woman kill the chicken?’
   d. Nání ji ǝtʃiś ɛ-mò bwatéo (*nání)?
    why FOC woman 3SG.sg-kill.PST chicken why
   ‘Why did the woman kill the chicken?’

   Similar facts obtain in embedded domains, as illustrated below. Space limitations preclude an enriched paradigm, but see Kandybowicz & Torrence (2011) for a
comprehensive data set covering all wh- expressions and a variety of embedded contexts, including embedded questions, which display the same pattern as in (1)-(2).

(3) a. Fe nu fe στίσω ε-μο ne?
   2SG hear COMP woman 3SG-kill.PST what
   ‘What did you hear that the woman killed?’

b. Fe nu fe στίσω ε-μο bvatéo nene?
   2SG hear COMP woman 3SG-kill.PST chicken how
   ‘How did you hear that the woman killed the chicken?’

c. *Fe nu fe στίσω ε-μο bvatéo nání?
   2SG hear COMP woman 3SG-kill.PST chicken why
   This asymmetry suggests a fundamental difference between why and the other interrogatives of Krachi, and dovetails with similar asymmetries observed for why cross-linguistically. For example, Reinhart (1998) observes that why in English does not occur in-situ even in multiple wh- questions (Who ate what versus *Who ate the rice why). Muriungi (2005) shows that in the Bantu language Kitharaka why and how are unlike other wh- expressions in the language in that they cannot occur in-situ. Similarly, Sabel (2003) shows that in Malagasy, an optional wh- movement language, why and how do not occur in-situ. (Note that how can occur in-situ in Krachi, cf. (3b).)

This cross-linguistic comparison raises the issue of how to analyze why (and how in Kitharaka and Malagasy). Recent analyses account for these kinds of asymmetries by positing that why alone is native to the left periphery. Rizzi (2001) argues that unlike other wh- expressions in Italian, why is base-generated in the left periphery and surfaces higher than the positions occupied by other moved interrogative constituents in the language. Ko (2005) shows that Korean why is base-merged in the left periphery and, unlike other interrogatives in the language, does not undergo covert movement to the clausal edge. For Zulu, another Bantu language, Buell (2011) demonstrates that, when why occurs postverbally, it occupies a (left-peripheral) position different from that of other post-verbal wh- expressions in the language that surface vP/TP-internally.

Krachi thus furnishes additional evidence that among wh- expressions, why is different. It does not have low or high merge variants, but is rather a dedicated peripheral operator.

References


