

Wh-questions in Balkar: an argument in favor of the choice function approach.

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This paper deals with *wh*-questions in (Karachay-)Balkar, a Turkic language spoken by the Balkars of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, Russia. The data was collected during fieldwork in Verkhnyaya Balkariya, Kabardino-Balkaria Republic.

Background

Kotek 2014 distinguishes between two general types of approaches to *wh*-in-situ: one type assuming covert movement of the *wh*-phrase and the in-situ approach using some other interpretive mechanisms to derive *wh*-questions in *wh*-in-situ. Huang 1982 follows the first approach and assumes that *wh*-phrases move at LF and, hence, syntactically occur higher than they are pronounced. Another influential approach is based on (Rooth-Hamblin) alternative computation: *wh*-elements generate a set of focus-semantic values which are then passed up the structure to calculate the focus-semantic value of a clause (Hamblin 1973, Rooth 1992). A different in-situ approach is the choice function approach that Reinhart 1998 argues for. Under this analysis *wh*-expressions are viewed as standard existentials interpreted via choice functions (functions applying to a non-empty set and yielding an individual element). Reinhart argues that the wide scope of *wh*-elements is due to the quantification over choice functions.

Data

Balkar is a *wh*-in-situ language which allows optional *wh*-scrambling. *Wh*-scrambling undergoes the same restrictions as the scrambling of the corresponding XPs, which lets us assume that there is nothing *wh*-specific to it, which is why *wh*-scrambling data is not going to be considered in this paper. In situ *wh*-expressions (both argument and adjunct) in Balkar can have matrix scope from an embedded clause both nominalized and finite (1). Matrix and embedded scope (direct and indirect questions) only differ in intonation.

- (1) a. alim fatima-ni zaš-i **ne(-ni)** žaz-kan-i-n ešt-gen-di?
Alim Fatima-gen son-3 what-acc write-pfct-3-acc hear-pfct-3sg
Alim heard that Fatima's son wrote what?
b. alim fatima-ni žaš-i **ne(-ni)** zaz-di dep ešt-gen-di?
Alim Fatima-gen son-3 what-acc write-pst comp hear-pfct-3sg

Multiple *wh*-expressions in an embedded clause can only be interpreted in the same clause (2). Multiple *wh*-questions do not show superiority effects.

- (2) A: sen kim kim-ni kōr-gen-i-n ešt-gen-se?
you who who-acc see-pfct-3-acc hear-pfct-2sg
a. *You heard that who saw who?*
b. *You heard who saw who.*
(*c. *Who did you hear saw who?*)

Argument in-situ *wh*-elements do not exhibit island effects (3a; 3b is there to show that *-kan-da* adjuncts are indeed islands in Balkar), while adjunct *wh*-elements do (4).

- (3) a. asijat kerim **ne(-ni)** boja-kan-da kitap oqu ede?
Asijat Kerim what-acc paint-pfct-loc book read
Asijat was reading a book when Kerim was painting what?
b. ***ne(ni)** asijat kerim boja-kan-da kitap oqu edi
(4) *asijat kerim xuna-ni **qajda** boja-kan-da kitap oqu ede

Asijat Kerim fence-acc where paint-pfct-loc book read
int. Asijat was reading a book while Kerim was painting the fence where?

Balkar also does not show any intervention effects (5–6).

- (5) a. **quru** alim **ne-ni** biledi?
 only Alim what-acc knows
 b. **ne-ni** **quru** alim biledi?
 what-acc only Alim knows
What does only Alim know?
- (6) a. **quru** alim [fatima-ni qiz-i **ne-ni** et-gen-i-n]
 only Alim Fatima-gen daughter-3 what-acc do-pfct-3-acc
 bil-e-di?
 know-ipfv-3sg
 b. **ne-ni** **quru** alim [fatimani qiz-i ~~ne-ni~~ et-gen-i-n]
 what-acc only Alim Fatima-gen daughter-3 do-pfct-3-acc
 bil-e-di?
 know-ipfv-3sg
What does only Alim know that Fatima's daughter did (cooked)?

Proposal

The lack of island effects with in-situ *wh*-elements, together with the lack of superiority and the fact that multiple *wh*-in-situ cannot be interpreted in different clauses (yielding sentences with the meaning *Who did you hear saw who?* which can only be achieved by scrambling in Balkar) are better predicted by in-situ approaches. The Rooth-Hamblin alternative computation theory would predict various intervention effects which have been examined at large and were nowhere to be found. These data seem to only be consistent with Reinhart's choice function analysis. Thus, in my presentation I will argue for following this approach in the analysis of Balkar *wh*-questions, which, apart from everything else, also seems to predict the argument vs adjunct asymmetry in (3)–(4).

References

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