

The Syntax of Q-particles in Manipuri Wh-Questions

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OVERVIEW: This work explores the syntax of Q-particles in Manipuri (a Tibeto-Burman, SOV language) in 3 basic, yet structurally distinct, types of wh-questions, with the claim that these particles are overt morphosyntactic markers of agreement with a higher probe head FOC and a lower phase head Φ – both of which are discourse opposites in terms of their feature matrixes. This claim differs from previous Q-particle analyses (Hagström 1998 for Sinhala; Kishimoto 2005 for Japanese; Cable 2010 for Tlingit), that view the Q-particle as a head in itself c-commanding the wh-word, and heading a QP that is ATTRACTed by the C. The three types of Manipuri wh-questions are in (1), - with a particle-less question being labeled TYPE 1, one with a question-final particle labeled TYPE 2, and one with two different particles (one on the wh-word and one question-finally) labeled TYPE 3:

- (1) a. John-nə kədəida catli? **TYPE 1** (no Q-particles present)
 John-NOM where.LOC go.PROG
 ‘Where is John going?’
- b. John-nə kədəida catli-no? **TYPE 2** (question-final Q particle *-no* present)
 John-NOM where.LOC go.PROG
 ‘Where is John going?’
- c. John-nə kədəida-no catli-do? **TYPE 3** (two different particles: *-no* on the wh-word and question-final *-do* present)
 who-NO where.LOC-NO go.PROG-DO
 ‘Where (is it that) John is going?’

As shown in the English translations, (1c) is different from (1a-b) in the fact that its interpretation is similar to a cleft question of the form ‘Who is it that ate the cake?’ However, I will argue in this paper that the structure of the TYPE 3 question is not a canonical cleft-like structure (Heggie 1988, Percus 1997, Kiss 1998, Pavey 2004, den Dikken 2008) but a biphrasal configuration resulting from feature valuation of two different probes, while TYPE 2 results from valuing a single probe, and TYPE 1 results from none of the probes being present at all.

ANALYSIS: It has been widely assumed in the literature that wh-words are inherently focused or F-marked, and thus carry, in addition to [+Wh] feature, a [+FOCUS] feature (Jayaseelan 1996, Sabel (2000), Sabel and Zeller (2006), Haida (2008)). Following that assumption, I claim that Manipuri wh-words carry the *interpretable* feature matrix [*iWh*, *iF*]. Redefining traditional theories of *feature percolation* (cf. Webelhuth 1989, Ortiz de Urbina 1990, Moritz and Valois 1994), which allowed transfer of features from a dominated element to its maximal projection in a rigidly local (Spec-Head) configuration (shown in (2)), I propose a new system of feature percolation where an XP containing an element Y with the feature [+ α] becomes [+ α], (shown in (3)):

- (2) a. [DP Y[+NEG] [D' ... t_Y]] (Whole DP is [+neg] by Spec-Head agreement) **Cyclic Feature percolation by Spec-Head agreement (Moritz and Valois 1994)**
 b. [DP [DP Y[+NEG] [D' ... t_Y]]_k [D' ... t_k]] (The higher DP is now [+neg])
 c. [NegP [DP [DP Y[+NEG] [D' ... t_Y]]_k [D' ... t_k]]_k [Neg' ... t_k]] (Movement to Spec, NegP to license Neg^o)

- (3) **Phase-bound Feature percolation by containment**
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In the system in (3), the transfer of the features [*iWh*, *iF*] is *obligatory* from the original element bearing it to the till the next strong phase projection. Thus, the claim is that in Manipuri wh-questions, the CP always carries the feature matrix [*iWh*, *iF*] by feature percolation from the wh-word, as in (3). The percolation stops at the CP, given its phase-bound nature (see Kidwai (2010) for arguments for the Manipuri CP as a phase). In a TYPE 1 question then, such as in (1a), schematized in (4) below, the whole CP has an interpretable Wh feature, as well as an interpretable focus feature:

- (4) [CP [IP_{MoodP} [AspP [vP John-nə [vP [kədəidə]_[iWh, iF] cət] li]]]_[iWh, iF] (assuming the extended verbal spine structure proposed in Kidwai (2010) for Manipuri)

The interpretable feature matrix on the CP does not require any valuation at LF, given the nature of interpretable features (Chomsky 2000, 2001), and the derivation goes on smoothly. In a TYPE 2 question, such as in (1b), the crucial claim is that there is a FOC head above the CP that is a probe due to its feature matrix consisting of two *uninterpretable* features – [*uWh*, *uF*]. Several authors have postulated the presence of a FOCUS projection in the syntax of wh-questions in various languages (Sabel 2000, Muriungi 2003, 2005, 2011, Madhavan 2007, Abels and Muriungi 2008). Following them, I posit the structure in (5) for all Manipuri TYPE 2 questions:

- (5) **The FOC [*uWh*, *uF*] finds the CP with the percolated feature matrix [*iWh*, *iF*] as the goal – resulting in MATCH (Chomsky 2001) of features, and consequently AGREE between the FOC head and the CP. The particle *-no* then appears on the Goal as a morphosyntactic strategy overtly signaling this AGREE relation.**
- The resulting structure is in (6):**
- (6)

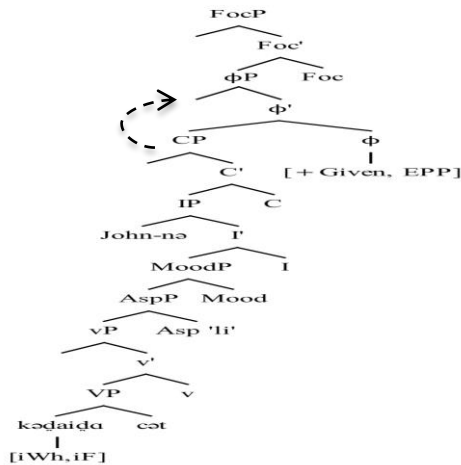
In a TYPE 3 question, such as in (1c), the crucial difference from TYPE 2 is in the presence of the particle *-no* on only the wh-word, and the presence of a separate particle *-do* question-finally. Before we get to an exposition of the structure of TYPE 3 questions, the data in (7) is to show us that *-do* functions as a

familiarity marker in Manipuri:

- (7) a. əj-gi ice-**do**, ma-di school-gi oja ni.
 I-GEN sister-DO, 3P-top school-GEN teacher COP
 ‘My sister, she’s a school teacher.’ (left dislocation of *-do* marked constituent possible)
- b. *thoɲnaw əmə-do, həwjik-phok haɲ-li
 window one-DO, now-still open-PROG
 ‘A window, its still open.’ (cannot be attached to an indefinite)

Given these facts of *-do* marking familiarity, I claim below that *-do* appears on a phrase as the result of AGREEMENT with the head ϕ , which has a discourse-related feature [+GIVEN], postulating that all the information contained within its projection is old information that has already been established in the discourse or the common ground of participants.

(8)



The strong phase head ϕ , with the feature [+Given] intervenes between the FocP and the CP – which is the crucial structural difference between TYPE 2 and TYPE 3 questions. ϕ 's character of being a strong phase head is fed by an EPP requirement, making it a probe by itself (Obata and Epstein 2011), and via Shortest Move (Chomsky 1989), the first goal it finds is the CP, which moves to [Spec, ϕ P] to satisfy EPP. The particle *-do* appears on the moved CP as a morphological indication of this movement to the Spec of a projection that contains old/familiar information.

This structure is, however, *not* the complete structure of a TYPE 3 question. Another probe, namely FOC°, has been merged and is looking to value its uninterpretable feature matrix. ϕ P being a phase, FOC° can only see its edge, i.e. [Spec, ϕ P] and thus the *-do* marked CP is visible to it. The possibility of agreement with this CP would result in (9) with the prediction that it is grammatical. However, (9) is strictly ungrammatical:

- (9) *[_{FocP} [_{ϕ P} John-na kadaida catli_j -**do** -**no** [_{CP} t_j [_{ϕ} [_{Foc} [#Wh, #F]]]]]]]]

I claim this ungrammaticality is a result of the basic feature incompatibility between the probe and the purported goal – the CP is already *-do* marked, i.e. it is discourse-old information, while the [*uF*] feature on FOC° needs new, non-given information. Here, inspired by Ura (1994), Rackowski and Richards (2005), I assume that an already AGREE-d-with CP is transparent and accessible to higher probes. FOC° can look inside the CP and find the wh-word [kədaidə]_[iWh, iF] as its goal, upon which, *just the wh-word gets marked with -no*. Thus, the presence and valuation of the two probes - FOC° and ϕ ° - turns the question into a discourse-structure driven bipartite form: - [**where**]_{FOC} [**John is going**]_{GIVEN}. The cleft-like interpretation in TYPE 3 questions then, seen in (1c), is a result of juxtaposing a specificational variable against already specified information, and not from a syntactic cleft configuration (contra Thangjam 2003).

EVIDENCE FROM MULTIPLE WH-QUESTIONS: Manipuri has been argued to be a wh-*insitu* language (Chelliah 1997, Thangjam 2003), and the data seen till now confirms that fact. Multiple wh-questions present strong evidence in favor of the analysis presented above. In (10-12) below, we see that TYPE 1 and TYPE 2 multiple wh-questions show Superiority Effects, while TYPE 3 wh-questions do not:

(10) a. kəna kəri lot-k ^h i? who what hide-PAST Lit.: ‘Who hid what?’ b. *kəri kəna lot-k ^h i?	TYPE 1	(11) a. kəna kəri lot-k ^h ri- no ? who what hide-PAST-NO Lit.: ‘Who hid what?’ b. *kəri kəna lot-k ^h ri- no ?	TYPE 2	(12) a. kəna- no kəri- no lot-k ^h ri- do ? who-NO what-NO hide-PAST-DO Lit.: ‘Who (is it that) what (is it) hid?’ b. ✓ kəri- no kəna- no lot-k ^h ri- do ?	TYPE 3
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I argue here that this difference of facts is a result of FOC° AGREE-ing *with multiple goals simultaneously* in TYPE 3 questions. A many-to-one mapping of feature-checking/valuation configuration where there is one Probe but multiple Goals has been argued for by many authors (Stjepanović 1995, Bošković 1997d, Richards 1997). Following them, the claim here is that in TYPE 3 multiple wh-questions, it’s the same structure as shown in (8), except now FOC°, (after rejecting the *-do* marked CP as a Goal), has two possible Goals in the two wh-words, both of which bear the same feature matrix – [*iWh, iF*]. Thus, FOC° AGREE-s with both of them simultaneously, and consequently, both the wh-words get marked with *-no*. This is shown in (13):

- (13) [_{FocP} [_{ϕ P} kəna-**no** kəri-**no** catli_j -**do** [_{CP} t_j [_{ϕ} [_{Foc} [#Wh, #F]]]]]]]]

After both wh-words have been *-no* marked, the relative order between them is freed up such that each can move over each other, making (12b) grammatical. In TYPE 2 questions, however, FOC° agrees with the CP (shown in (5)), and thus the wh-words inside the CP still retain the fixed order, as seen in (14):

- (14) [_{FocP} [_{CP} kəna kəri catli -**no** [_{Foc} [#Wh, #F]]]]]]

Thus, AGREE-ment with FOC obliterates Superiority effects among wh-words in Manipuri. In TYPE 1, there is no FOC, while in TYPE 2, FOC agrees with the CP, keeping Superiority effects *inside the CP* intact. Only in TYPE 3 questions, FOC can agree with all wh-words, making them ‘equal’ in a sense and leading to the dissolution of concerns of superiority.

FURTHER IMPLICATIONS: The theory of question-particles presented in this work has broader consequences for the grammatical theory of Q-particles in general. The data from TYPE 3 multiple wh-questions in Manipuri compel us to reject previous accounts of Q-particles (Hagström 1998; Kishimoto 2005; Cable 2010). Cable argued that the Q-particle is a head by itself in the grammar that is *adjoined* to the wh-word. C° ATTRACTS the Q-particle, which then moves, leaving the wh-word *insitu*. This account would be unable to explain the data in (11a-b): one would have to claim that every wh-word in TYPE 3 multiple wh-questions have a Q-particle *-no* adjoined to it, and that C° ATTRACT(ion) pulls up all the particles, leaving the wh-words *insitu*. Not only does that crucially violate word order facts, it also leads to stipulation of multiple unnecessary adjunctions, because Manipuri can have all wh-words marked with *-no*, even if there are more than two. Neither can the Q-particle adjunction theory account for the dependency with the second particle (*-do*) that is seen in Manipuri wh-questions, i.e. it appears question-finally whenever the wh-words are *-no* marked, leading to a cleft-like interpretation.

The theory of phase-bound feature percolation by containment along with the feature valuation hypothesis proposed here, can explain the Q-particle facts observed in the previous works mentioned above. I will argue in the talk that keeping the tenets of the theory proposed here intact – i.e. Feature transfer is also obligatory in Sinhala/Japanese/Tlingit, just as in Manipuri, and assuming the same universal feature matrix for wh-words - [*iWh, iF*], and the presence of the same interrogative FOC head as in Manipuri, the derivations would be almost identical.

Selected References:

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