On Wh in-situ

One of the long-term debates in linguistic theory concerns the boundedness of Wh-movement. The relevant fact is that overt displacement of the Wh-phrase in languages like English (1) appears to be more constrained than covert displacement of the Wh-element in languages like Chinese (2). The dominant view, championed by Huang (1982), is that subjacency applies only to overt movement. More recent work by Merchant (1999), and Fox and Lasnik (2003) has shown that island violations are PF effects and that PF operations like ellipsis cancel their unacceptability.

A challenge to this proposal comes from languages like Hindi/Urdu, where the Wh-phrase appears to be in-situ (and so to moves covertly), but which still seem to obey island constraints (3). To account for this, Dayal (1996) suggests a parametric view in which subjacency operates at LF in Hindi-Urdu. This account however is challenged by the fact overt instances of Wh-movement in Hindi/Urdu also obey subjacency (4) and more interestingly that these violations get repaired under sluicing (5) in Hindi/Urdu, suggesting that subjacency violations in Hindi, like those in English, are PF effects.

What of the Wh-phrases that appear to remain in-situ? I propose that contrary to appearances, these “in-situ” Wh-phrases in Hindi/Urdu involve overt Wh-movement. This paper proposes an alternative analysis of Wh-movement in Hindi/Urdu, in which a part of the wh-phrase moves overtly (see (6)). The idea is similar to the one in Watanabe (1994) for Japanese. Both advocate overt movement of the Wh-operator. The Wh-operator in languages like Hindi and Japanese is not pronounced at the C head. This derives the absence of any phonetic impact of movement while preserving the constraints on movement typical of fronting. Evidence in support of Wh-operator movement in Hindi comes from Wh scope-marking constructions where a Wh-operator appears in the matrix clause, even if the Wh-phrase remains in-situ in the embedded clause (7).

In exploring this idea, the paper highlights the difference in question formation strategies in some traditionally claimed “Wh in-situ” languages like Hindi and Chinese. I show that languages like Hindi that involve overt Wh-movement allow sluicing and are also sensitive to island effects, Beck (1996) style intervention effects and weak crossover effects. In contrast, languages like Chinese that don’t involve movement of the Wh-phrase, don’t allow sluicing or parasitic gaps, and are insensitive to island effects, Beck style intervention effects and weak crossover effects. This paper thus suggests a three-way language typology in terms of Wh-movement, where languages exhibit three kinds of strategies; overt phrasal movement, overt head movement and no movement. I further propose that it is this difference in the nature of Wh-movement that results in varying degree of boundedness of Wh-movement in these languages.
Examples

(1) * Who do you like the books that t bought?

(2) Ni zui xihuan [shei mai de shu]?
   You most like [who buy prt book]
   "Who do you like the books that bought?"

(3) *tum un kitaboN-ko jin-ko kis-ne khariida pasand karte ho
   You those books-Acc which-Acc who-Erg bought like do is
   "Who do you like the books that bought?"

(4) *kis-ne tum un kitaboN-ko jin-ko khariida pasand karte ho
   who-Erg You those books-Acc which-Acc bought like do is
   "Who is Ram upset because Sita loves?"

(5) tum un kitaboN-ko jin-ko kisi-ne khariida pasand karte ho, par mai nahi jaanta kis-ne
   you those books-Acc which-Acc someone-Erg bought like do is but I not know who-Erg
   "You like the books that someone bought but I don’t know who"

(6) [WH [ raam-ne t-kis-ko dekhaa]
   Ram-Erg who-Acc saw
   "Who did Ram see?"

(7) Siita-ne kya sochaa ki [ raam-ne t-kis-ko dekhaa]
   Sita-Erg what thought that Ram-Erg who-Acc saw
   "Who did Sita think that Ram saw?"

References


