Wh-Indeterminates in Right Periphery and Alternative Semantics

In Japanese Right Dislocation construction, interrogative wh-phrases cannot appear at the right side of the matrix verb, as exemplified in (1). In contrast, Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) such as nani-mo ‘anything’ can appear in the dislocated position as in (2). If interrogative wh-phrases and NPIs are to be licensed by Q-particle and NEG, respectively, the difference of acceptability requires an explanation. In this talk we will account for this difference in a unified way in terms of the decomposition of wh-phrases and their property of creating alternatives proposed originally by Kuroda (1965) and Hamblin (1973), respectively.

Japanese wh-phrases have been argued to be indeterminate pronouns, which can be interpreted as wh-questions, existential or universal quantifiers, depending on attached particles. Question-marking particles must be in the clause-final position and they determine the scope of the question, as shown in (4a) and (4b). (4c) shows that wh-phrases must be in the scope of the licensing Q-particle. The impossibility of a right-dislocated wh-phrase indicates that the wh-phrase is not in the scope of the Q-particle. In other words, no interpretation is assigned to the wh-phrase in (1), resulting in the ungrammaticality. The same morpheme creates existential quantifiers when attached directly on a wh-phrase. The wh-phrase is legitimately interpreted in the domain of the DP and it can occur in the right periphery of the clause as in (3). The same holds true for the case of particle -mo. It can be directly attached on a wh-phrase and provides an NPI interpretation for the wh-indeterminate. Thus NPIs can appear in the dislocated position as in (2), in contrast to wh-questions, which cannot be legitimately interpreted in the dislocated position. These considerations lead us to the generalization that only the legitimately interpreted wh-phrases can appear in the right periphery. The supporting evidence comes from the contrast between (5b) and (5c). The indeterminate pronoun can be associated with the universal particle -mo in a non-local fashion as in (5a), where the domain of wh-indeterminate expands until it meets the particle. When Right Dislocation is applied to the sentence of this kind, the larger DP including both indeterminate pronoun and particle can be right dislocated (5b), but the relative clause that includes only indeterminate pronoun cannot, as in (5c). Note that relative clause itself can be right dislocated as in (6); thus the appearance of indeterminate pronoun in the right periphery causes the ungrammaticality. The positioning of embedded clauses corroborates this analysis. An embedded indirect question can be right dislocated (7a), since the wh-phrase is interpreted by the Q-particle within the dislocated clause. The postverbal positioning of a clause with a wh-phrase intended to have wide scope is not allowed (7b), since the proper interpretation cannot be assigned to the wh-phrase within the dislocated embedded clause.

Assuming the decomposition of wh-phrases and their property of creating alternatives, we can offer a unified account for a possible occurrence of wh-phrases in the right periphery of the clause. We propose that legitimate interpretation in question means the compatibility of created sets; that is, elements in the right periphery must create an alternative set that is compatible with the one created by the preceding clause. Thus the ungrammaticality of (1) can be explained as the incompatibility of created sets: the wh-phrase generates a set, for example, of foods, while the preceding clause creates alternatives of proposition {John ate, John did not eat}. Our proposal predicts that if the problematic incompatibility is repaired, the sentence becomes grammatical. This prediction is born out by the facts in (8). In addition, our proposal also predicts that not only wh-phrases but also focused elements in general cannot be right dislocated in Japanese, as illustrated in (9). This can be also explained as the incompatibility of alternative sets created by FOCUS: the postverbal element is associated with a set, for example, of famous wine-producing areas, while the preverbal focus-inducing particle generates alternative set of drinks. In the case of grammatical NPI right dislocation, the mo-particle is taken to contribute the meaning that all the alternatives created by the wh-indeterminate are true, which is not incompatible with preceding negation.
Data

(1) John-wa tabemasita ka, nani-o
    John-TOP ate.polite Q what-ACC
    intended: ‘What did John eat?’

(2) John-wa iwanakatta yo, nani-mo.
    John-TOP did not say PRT anything
    ‘John didn’t say anything.’

(3) Kita yo, dare-ka.
    came PRT someone
    ‘Someone came.’

    Mary-TOP John-NOM what-ACC read Q know
    ‘Mary knows what John read.’

b. Mary-wa [John-ga nani-o yonda to] omotteimasu ka?
    Mary-TOP John-NOM what-ACC read COMP think.polite Q
    ‘What does Mary think that John read?’

    Mary-TOP who-DAT John-NOM this book-ACC read Q told
    Lit. ‘Mary told who John read this book.’

    which student-NOM wrote article -MO be interesting
    ‘For every student x, the article(s) that x wrote is interesting.’

b. omosiroi yo, dono gakusei-ga kaita ronbun-mo.
    be interesting PRT which student-NOM wrote article -MO

c. ronbun-mo omosiroi yo, dono gakusei-ga kaita.
    article -MO be interesting PRT which student-NOM wrote

(6) ronbun-ga omosiroi yo, John-ga kaita.
    article-NOM be interesting PRT John-NOM wrote
    ‘The article that John wrote is interesting.’

(7) a. John-ga tazuneta yo, [CP Mary-ga nani-o yonda ka]
    John-NOM asked PRT Mary-NOM what-ACC read Q
    ‘John asked what Mary read.’

b. ’John-wa omotteimasu ka, [CP Mary-ga nani-o yonda to]
    John-NOM think.polite Q Mary-NOM what-ACC read COMP
    Intended: ‘What does John think Mary read?’

(8) a. John-wa nani-o tabemasita ka, nani-o
    John-TOP what-ACC ate.polite Q what-ACC

b. dono gakusei-ga kaita ronbun-mo omosiroi, dono gakusei-ga kaita
    which student-NOM wrote article-MO be interesting whish student-NOM wrote

c. John-wa doo omotteimasu ka, [CP Mary-ga nani-o yonda ka]
    John-TOP WH think.polite Q Mary-NOM what-ACC read Q

(9) John-wa wain-dake nomu yo, borudoo-no
    John-TOP wine-only drinks PRT Bordeaux-of
    intended: ‘John drinks only Bordeaux wine.’

References