

## Focus Intervention Effects as Competition Effects

Barry Chung-Yu Yang

National Tsing Hua University

**The Issue:** Intervention effects involving focus as in (1) are generally assumed to be more stable cross-linguistically. Kim (2002, 2005) and Beck (2006) propose that the spirit of focus intervention effects should be that the intervening focus element would wrongly check (or reset) the focus value of the in-situ *wh*-element as sketched in (2), leaving the higher C-head nothing to work on. Yet, they cannot explain why such effects are weakened when the same construction is embedded as in (3) (see Tomioka 2007 for more cases). Tomioka (2007) suggests a pragmatic approach where the embedding contexts help to turn the interveners into background information which is just required by the in-situ *wh*-elements, hence the weakening effects. However, Miyagawa and Endo (2004) point out that it is the d-linkedness that is at work there, instead of the pragmatic effects. Nonetheless, they cannot explain why the simple sentences in (1) are not weakened by the d-linkedness. In general, none of the above approaches can explain the embedding problem satisfactorily.

**The proposal:** I propose to solve the embedding problem by “Competition Effects”. Competition Effects derive from a traditional notion of “one-slot-per-Comp”. Specifically, such effects occur when a focus-operator (F-Op) introduced by the focus subject and a Q-operator (Q-Op) introduced by the in-situ *wh*-object compete for the same slot, Comp, in CP. Though not new, this simple idea explains the embedding problem elegantly. That is, when embedded as in (3), the F-Op takes the embedded Comp position so that it does not compete with the Q-Op taking the matrix Comp. The contrast in d-linkedness between the embedded and matrix clauses is also solved following Pesetsky’s (1987) idea that a base-generated Q is merged at matrix Comp for the d-linked *wh*-in-situ. Therefore, when the F-Op takes the matrix Comp in simple sentence like (1), the Competition Effects occur; when it takes the embedded Comp as (2), no such effects occur and only the d-linking reading surfaces.

**Further consequences:** This idea further handles three puzzles nicely: i) the well-formedness of the non-d-linked *wh*-elements in Chinese embedded contexts (in contrast to Japanese); ii) the lack of focus intervention effects for the focus adverbials in (6b) in Chinese (in contrast to focus “adnominal” in (6a)); iii) the positional contrast in English in (7). The first puzzle is explained by adopting the unselective binding approach (Tsai 1994, Reinhart 1998) to Chinese *wh*’s-in-situ (cf. Watanabe 1992 for Japanese ones). The second puzzle is solved by assuming the F-Op introduced by the focus adverbials is merged unto *v*P or a certain functional projection within IP, hence no Competition Effects in CP. The third puzzle is handled via Pesetsky’s (2000) observation that in (7a) *which girl* undergoes feature movement while in (7b) *which boy* covert phrasal movement. That is, feature movement targets Comp, triggering Competition Effects, whereas covert phrasal movement targets Spec, hence no such effects.

**Remaining issue:** Although the Competition Effects have a broader coverage than previous approaches, it is still pending why the embedding constructions are not perfect (at least one question mark, see (3)). It may be the case that either the focus effects or the pragmatic effects still have their footages here, just as both the ECP and the Subjacency were taken into account when we dealt with the *wh*-argument/-adjunct interaction in the ‘80s. I will leave it open for now. Hopefully, this study can bring a step closer to the general picture and thus to the understanding of intervention effects.

(Japanese data are from Tomioka 2007. Interveners are marked with an underline, while intervenees with bold face.)

- (1) a. ?\*Taro-sika **nani-o** yom-ana-katta-no?  
 Taro-except what-acc read-neg-past-Q  
 ‘What did no one but Taro read?’  
 |  
 b. ?\*Daremo **nani-o** yom-ana-katta-no?  
 anyone what-acc read-neg-past-Q  
 ‘What did no one read?’

(2) \* $[_{CP} C_{[iQ,iF]} [\dots Foc_{[iF]} \dots [\dots wh_{[uQ,uF]} \dots]]]$  (adapted from Kim 2005)

- (3) a. ?(?)Kimi-wa  $[_{CP}$  Taro-sika **nani-o** yom-ana-katta-to] omotteiru-no?  
 you-top Taro-except what-acc read-neg-past-comp think-Q  
 ‘What do you think that no one but Taro read?’

- b. ?(?)Kimi-wa  $[_{CP}$  daremo **nani-o** yom-ana-katta-to] omotteiru-no?  
 you-top anyone what-acc read-neg-past-comp think-Q  
 ‘What do you think that no one read?’

(4) \* $[_{CP} \downarrow \_ [_{IP} F-NP_i \dots wh_j]]$   
 ↑  
 Q-Op<sub>j</sub>

(5)  $[_{CP} Q-Op_j [_{IP} \dots [_{CP} F-Op_i [_{IP} F-NP_i \dots wh_j]]]$

- (6) a. ?\*Zhiyou Zhangsan chi-le **shenme**?  
 only Zhangsan eat-Perf. what  
 ‘What did only Zhangsan eat?’

- b. Zhangsan zhi [chi-le **shenme**?]  
 Zhangsan only eat-Perf. what  
 ‘What did Zhangsan only eat?’

- (7) a. ??Which boy did only Mary introduce **which girl** to \_\_\_? (Pesetsky 2000)  
 b. Which girl did only Mary introduce \_\_\_ to **which boy**?

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