TP-internal Qu-morphemes in Sinhala Yes/No Constructions

A Qu-morpheme (question morpheme) is an element that is responsible for typing a clause as an interrogative, presumably when its Qu-feature values an uninterpretable feature in C. For example, the addition of the Qu-morpheme $d$ to the Sinhala statement in (1a) results in the yes/no construction in (1b). It is most economical for a Qu-morpheme to be Merged directly in C, from where its Qu-feature can type a clause, as in (2a), in which $d$ ‘Qu’ appears in clause-final position, a position that I assume to be C. However, in (2b), $d$ ‘Qu’ occurs TP-internally, a position that must be below C, since C linearly follows $v$, as Sinhala projections are head-final at Spell-Out (Sumangala 1992). Even though the Qu-morpheme appears TP-internally, it is responsible for giving the clause a yes/no interpretation. This fact raises the following question: why does Sinhala allow a Qu-morpheme to be Merged in a TP-internal position in a yes/no construction when it is most economical for the Qu-morpheme to be Merged directly in C? In this paper, I argue that a Focus-feature forces this TP-internal Merge of a Qu-morpheme.

The semantic difference between yes/no constructions with a clause-peripheral and a TP-internal Qu-morpheme provides evidence that there are two types of Qu-morphemes in Sinhala. Both types contain a Qu-feature; however, one type also contains a Focus-feature. When the Qu-morpheme appears in a TP-internal position in (2b), the phrase that it directly follows, ee pota ‘that book’, functions as what Kiss (1998) refers to as an identificational focus; it refers to new information and to an exhaustive set, as indicated by the English translation of ee pota-$d$ ‘that book-Qu’ as a cleft. I propose that this identificational focus interpretation results from the presence of a Focus-feature within the TP-internal $d$ ‘Qu’, as shown in (3a), in which $F_{Qu}$ represents a Qu-feature and $F_{Foc}$ represents a Focus-feature. In a yes/no construction with a clause-peripheral Qu-morpheme, such as (2a), there is no identificational focus. I propose that this clause-peripheral $d$ ‘Qu’ lacks a Focus-feature, as shown in (3b).

According to this analysis, constructions such as (2a-b) with clause-peripheral and TP-internal Qu-morphemes are accounted for as follows. In (2a), $d_{[F_{Qu}]}$ is Merged directly in C, where its Qu-feature types the clause as a yes/no construction. In (2b), $d_{[F_{Qu}, F_{Foc}]}$ is Merged in a TP-internal position adjoined to ee pota ‘that book’. The Focus-feature contained within the Qu-morpheme forces the Qu-morpheme to be Merged TP-internally adjacent to a phrase that is the focus of the interrogative. The Qu-morpheme is a head that does not project, and as such, it functions as both a minimal and a maximal projection (Chomsky 1995a, 1995b), thereby allowing it to adjoin to the DP ee pota ‘that book.’ From this TP-internal position, the Focus-feature raises from the Qu-morpheme to the head of a FocP projection, which occurs below CP, in order to focus and to give scope to its associated phrase. Furthermore, the Qu-feature must move from the Qu-morpheme to C to type the clause as an interrogative. Movement of the Focus-feature and Qu-feature to Foc and C, respectively, is shown in (3).

Sinhala shows verbal agreement that supports this analysis. When the Qu-morpheme occurs directly in C, as in (2a), the verb has an ‘-A’ ending, which is the default verbal suffix (Gair and Sumangala 1991:94). When the Qu-morpheme occurs in a TP-internal position, then the verb appears with an ‘-E’ ending. I propose that the ‘-E’ ending is the pronunciation of a Focus-feature that has moved to Foc, as shown in (3). When there is no Focus-feature, then the default ‘-A’ ending occurs on the verb in T. Sumangala (1992) argues that movement of a null focus operator triggers the ‘-E’ ending. Hagstrom (1998) argues that the ‘-E’ ending appears when the Qu-morpheme moves at LF and the ‘-A’ ending appears when the Qu-morpheme moves overtly. Kishimoto (2005) argues that a weak [+Q] feature on a verb triggers the ‘-E’ ending and the Qu-morpheme moves at LF, whereas a strong [+Q] feature on a verb forces overt movement of the Qu-morpheme. My analysis demonstrates that the notions that there is focus operator movement, LF movement of a Qu-morpheme, and/or strong and weak [+Q] features on a verb are not required to account for the facts. Rather, the ‘-E’ ending is simply a moved Focus-feature.

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that in certain languages such as Sinhala there can be a close connection between an interrogative clausal typing element and focus, as both a Qu-feature and a Focus-feature co-occur in the same morpheme. Furthermore, in this paper I demonstrate that this analysis accounts for the existence of TP-internal Qu-morphemes in yes/no constructions in other languages such as Okinawan, Premodern Japanese, Tupí, and Ewen.
(1) (a) Kolambọ basekaka tienawa.
Colombo bus be-A
‘There is a bus to Colombo.’
(b) Kolambọ basekaka tienawa dọ?
Colombo bus be-A Qu
‘Is there a bus to Colombo.’ (Gair 1970:139)

(2) (a) Chitra ee potọ kieuwọ dọ?
Chitra that book read-A Qu
‘Did Chitra read that book?’
(b) Chitra [ee potọ]-dọ kieuwọ?
Chitra that book-Qu read-E
‘Was it that book that Chitra read?’ (Kishimoto 2005:11)

(3) (a) dọ[FQu,FFoc]
(b) dọ[FQu]

(4) 

References