Semantic Denotation of *mI* Particle in Questions

This paper focuses on the semantic properties of the particle *mI* in yes/no and alternative questions in Turkish. Although the particle has been looked at from different perspectives including phonology, syntax, and pragmatics, there does not seem to be any accounts from a semantic perspective. Specifically, while *mI* mostly occurs in yes/no and alternative questions in Turkish, it does not occur in wh-questions and it is a particle that floats within a sentence, causing meaning differences in terms of scope of the questioned part in some occasions (see appendix A) [1, 2, 5].
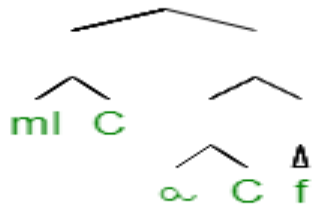
In example (1), *mI* introduces the default focus scope a question should bear. Existence and uniqueness presuppositions are interpreted in examples (2) and (4), and the same presuppositions over a pair given in (5). Moreover, (3) introduces a presupposition a previous discussion of places that Ayşe has gone. Finally, example (6) presupposes that Ayşe has gone somewhere and focuses on that place. Upon assuming that *mI* is a question particle, the fact that it does not occur in wh-questions becomes an issue to be solved. When it is assumed that it is a yes/no question particle, then the question of why it appears in alternative questions - in fact twice – arises.

When the given examples and Kartunnen's [4] account on the semantics of questions are taken into consideration, *mI* semantically selects set of propositions (proto-question) and introduces exhaustivity over the set of alternatives induced by focus, not the proto-question (see (7) in appendix A). In other words, *mI* (we can refer to it as '*Question Focus Particle'* [2, 5]*)* takes a question in a context (proto-question) turns it into a question with the exhaustivity presupposition, where existence is accounted by the focus in the question.

Following Buring and Kamali [3] example (3) is regarded as a long-distance question. They say the stressed element is a contrastive Topic (CT). Furthermore, they assert that CT in a sentence introduces the presupposition of the existence of a discourse strategy, which is non-exhaustive and composed of a superquestion (question under discussion), subquestion and answers [3]. In other words, CT in a yes/no question presupposes the existence of the element being asked, but not exhaustivity. The contrast between (1) and (2) remains a problem in their account. Previous literature merely says that there is a focus in the sentence. But focus alone does not introduce an it-cleft presupposition (see (8) and (9) in appendix A). *mI* in alternative and embedded questions remains as a problem to be addressed in a further research. More research on this is likely to reveal what it denotes. This is a preliminary study as to what *mI* refers to. For the time being, it appears that *mI* is a question focus particle which takes a proto-question in Kartunnen's sense and introduces uniqueness in yes/no questions.

APPENDIX A
DATA

(1) Ayşe   ev-e   git-*mIş*   ***mI*****?**
    Ayşe home-DAT   go-EV/PF   PTCL
    'Has Ayşe gone home?'

(2) Ayşe   EV-E   ***mI***   git-*mIş*?
    Ayşe home-DAT PTCL go-EV/PF
    'Is it HOME that Ayşe has gone to?'

(3) Ayşe EV-E   git-*mIş*   ***mI*****?**
    Ayşe HOME-DAT   go-EV/PF PTCL
    'Has Ayşe gone HOME?'

(4) AYŞE ***mI***   ev-e   git-*mIş*?
    AYŞE PTCL home-DAT   go-EV/PF
    'Is it AYŞE who has gone home?'

(5) Ayşe   EV-E   ***mI***   git-*mIş*   OKUL-A   ***mI*****?**
    Ayşe   HOME-DAT PTCL go-EV/PF SCHOOL-DAT   PTCL
    'Has Ayşe gone HOME or to SCHOOL?'

(6) Ayşe   nere-ye   git-*mIş*   **(*mI**)?**
    Ayşe   where-DAT go-EV/PF   PTCL
    'Where has Ayşe gone?

(7) ⟦*mI*⟧^{w} = ⅄C. ⅄Q: ∃!p∈C such that p(w)=1.Q

(8) MARY came.
    MARY come-PAST

(9) It was   MARY who came.
    It be-PAST MARY who come-PAST

Selected References: **[1]** Göksel, A., & Kerslake, C. (2005). *Turkish: A comprehensive grammar.* Routledge. **[2]** Gračanin-Yuksek, M. (2014). Alternative questions in Turkish. *Workshop in Altaic Formal Linguistics (WAFL) 10 Presentation*, (pp. 2-4). **[3]** Kamali, B., & Büring, D. (2011). Topics in questions. In *Workshop on the Phonological Marking of Focus and Topic: GLOW* (Vol. 34). **[4]** Karttunen, L. (1977). Syntax and semantics of questions. *Linguistics and philosophy, 1*(1), pp. 3-44. **[5]** Kornfilt, J. (2013). Turkish. Routledge.