Right dislocation as multidominance, and beyond

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Focus/*wh*-association in RD

▸ RD in Cantonese [CC], Mandarin [MC], and Japanese [JP] allows for a peculiar **"leftward" association** of **'only/the-hell'** expressions (first observed by Cheung 1997 for Cantonese; *cf.* Cheung 2009)

(1) [Aaming zungji _ *nibun syu*F zaa3] **zinghai**.   [CC]
    Ming like   this book SFP only
    'Ming only likes *this book*.'

(2) [_ *Shei* hui lai a] **daodi**?   [MC]
    who will come SFP the.hell
    'Who the hell will come?'

(3) *Dare*-ga ki-ta   n-da, **ittai**?   [JP]
    who-NOM come-PST NMLZ-COP the.hell
    'Who the hell came?'

  ❑ Note that RD in the three languages are often gapped, and both arguments and adjuncts can undergo RD (Tanaka 2001, Cheung 2009, Yip 2025)

▸ 'Only/the-hell' has a particular c-command requirement of focus/*wh*-association

(4) 'Only/the-hell' expressions must *c-command* the **pronounced** copy of their focus/*wh*-associate.

  ❑ *All* existing approaches on RD (with movement and ellipsis/sluicing) **cannot** generate the correct c-command relations to satisfy (4):

*[main ... focus/wh ...] SFP [RD ... 'only'/'the hell' ... ~~focus/wh~~ ...]
        ↑ *no* c-command ┘   └ *c-command* ↑

Not movement

▸ Prominent approach to RD: *Monoclausal movement* (Cheung 1997, 2009; Chiang 2017; Lee 2017, 2021; Wei & Li 2018; Yip 2020; *i.a.*)

[CP Δ SFP [Δ... [TP 'only/the-hell'...focus/*wh*]]]

▸ However, focus **cannot** move out of *only*'s scope (Jackendoff 1972; Tancredi 1990; Erlewine 2014, *i.a.*)

  ❑ The same is true for 'the-hell' expressions (Huang & Ochi 2004)
  ❑ Topicalization, relativization, focus movement (A'); raising (A)
  ❑ Although they allow for vanilla reconstruction (for quantifiers & anaphors; Y.-h. A. Li 2000; Law and Pan 2023; Yip & Ahenkorah 2023)

(5) *Ni zek gau*F, Aaming **zinghai** m-zungji _ aa3.   [CC]
    this CL dog Ming only   not-like _ SFP
    Int.: 'Ming only doesn't like *this dog*.'

(6) *Na zhi gou*, ZS **daodi** bu-xihuan _ le?   [MC]
    which CL dog ZS the.hell not-like _ SFP
    Int.: 'Which dog does ZS not like?'

Not ellipsis/sluicing

▸ Alternative approach to RD: *Biclausal sluicing* (Tanaka 2001; Cheung 2015; Tang 2015, 2018; Yip 2025; *cf.* Ott & de Vries 2016)
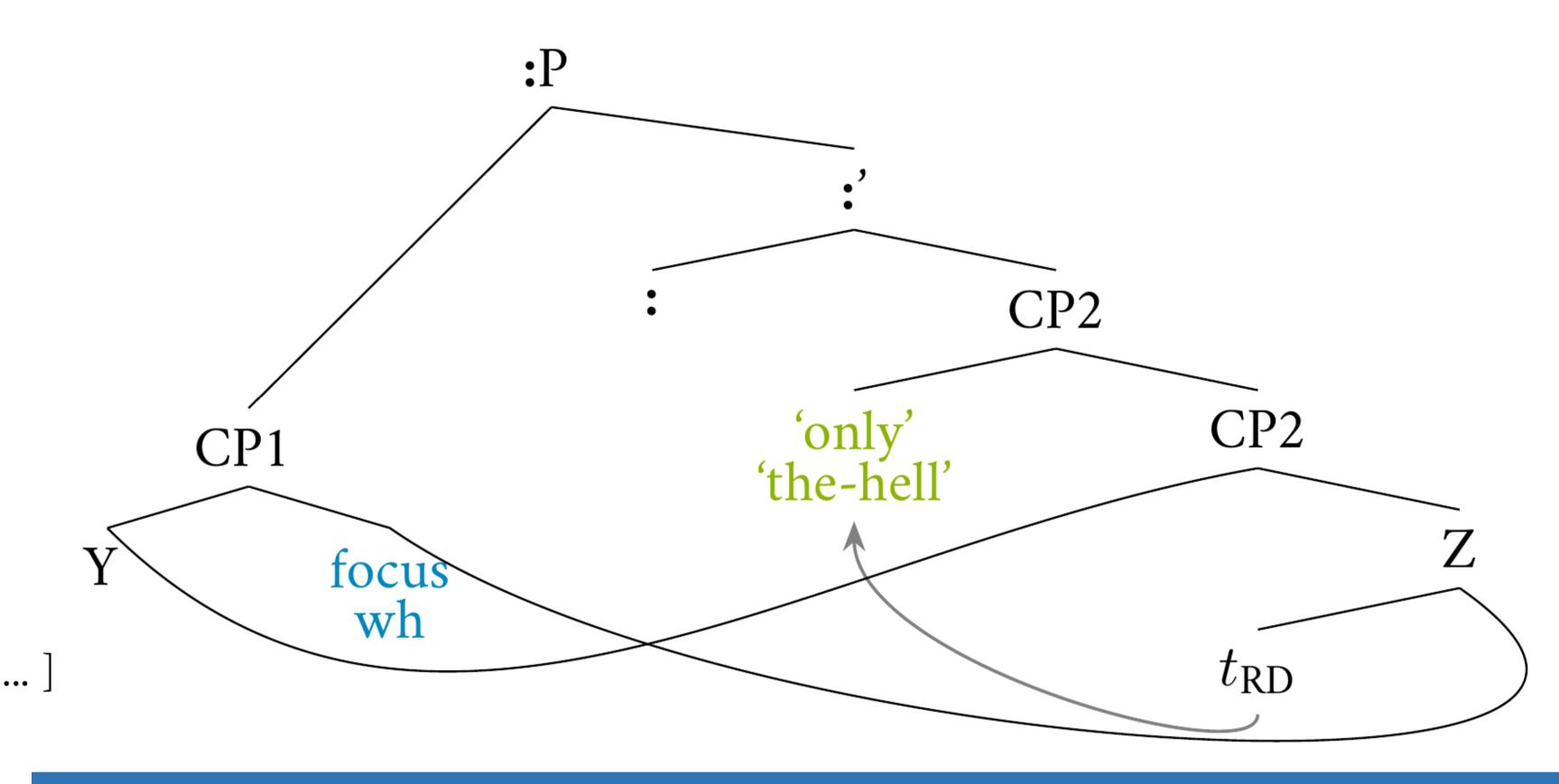
[CP1 ...focus/*wh*...SFP][CP2 Δ ['only/the-hell'...~~focus/wh~~]]

▸ However, *only* **cannot** associate into ellipsis sites (Beaver & Clark 2008; Bassi, Hirsch & Trinh 2022; *cf.* Cheung 2009:213)

(7) Aaming **zinghai** wui maai *siusyut*F.   [CC]
    Ming only   will buy novel
    *Aafan dou **zinghai** wui [VP ~~maai siusyut~~F]
    Fan also only   will
    'Ming will only buy novels. Fan as well.'

  ❑ The same is true for 'the-hell' expressions
  ❑ *Wh*-words may independently be elided in fragment questions which have a sluicing syntax (H. Li 2015; Wei 2018), but ellipsis fails with 'the-hell'

(8) a. Ta {mingtian/ **daodi**} qu *na*? (Xuexiao.)   [MC]
      3SG tomorrow/ the.hell go where school
      'Where will he go tomorrow?' 'School.'
   b. Na ni {mingtian/ *daodi} ~~qu na~~ ne?
      then 2SG tomorrow/ the.hell go where SFP
      'Where(*the-hell) will you go (tmr)?'

[main ... focus/*wh* ...] SFP [RD 'only/the-hell' ⟵···⟶]

What is the nature of the silence in RD?

❑ Movement?   ☞   NO.
❑ Ellipsis?   ☞   NO.
❑ **Multidominance?**   ☞   **YES!**

A novel approach: RD as multidominance

▸ Adopting Citko's (2005) **Parallel Merge** to RD:

(9) CP2 **shares** every node with CP1 except for the defocused element(s) that undergo(es) mvt.

  ❑ Resemble "non-bulk sharing" structures in conjoined *wh*-questions (e.g., Gračanin-Yuksek 2007)

▸ All shared nodes pronounce in the main chunk
▸ Generates **correct c-command relations** to satisfy (4): (*à la* Wilder 1999)

[main ... focus/wh ...] SFP [RD 'only'/'the hell']
        └────── *c-command* ↑

  Wilder's (1999) definition of c-command
  ❑ *Sharing*: α is shared by X and Y iff (i) neither of X and Y dominates the other, and (ii) both X and Y dominate α
  ❑ *Full dominance*: X fully dominates α iff X dominates α and X does not share α
  ❑ X *c-commands* α iff (i) X≠α, (ii) X does not fully dominate α, (iii) α does not dominate X, and (iv) all categories that dominate X dominate α.

→ **Multidominance** is not just another pathway to silence, but it differs from *Copy Deletion (movement)* and *ellipsis* in creating **distinct structural relations**

Beyond RD: Right-Node Raising

▸ RNR is analyzed with multidominance (Wilder 1999; Belk, Neeleman & Philip 2023; MC: Cheng 2009; *i.a.*)
▸ Focus association of 'only' is also possible, corroborating the multidominant analysis

(10) [Aaming **zinghai** zungji _] ji [Aafan **zinghai** toujim *nibun syu*F]   [CC]
     Ming only   like but Fan only   hate this book
     'Ming only likes, but Fan only hates, *this book*.'

  ❑ 'Only' in 1st-conjunct c-commands and associates with the pronounced object in 2nd-conjunct.

['only' ...] & ['only' ... focus]
  c-command   *c-command*

→ **A new diagnostic test for multidominance!**

▸ Also true in English – See Yip & Tamar-Mattis's (2025 April) WCCFL talk!

More trees & data

Selected references ● **Beaver**, D. I. & B. Z. **Clark**. 2008. *Sense and Sensitivity: How Focus Determines Meaning.* ● **Cheung**, L. Y.-L. 2009. "Dislocation focus construction in Chinese." *JEAL* 18(3): 197–232. ● **Citko**, B. 2005. "On the nature of Merge: External Merge, Internal Merge, and Parallel Merge." *LI* 36(4): 475–496. ● **Gračanin-Yuksek**, M. 2007. "About sharing." PhD diss., MIT. ● **Huang**, C.-T. J. & M. **Ochi**. 2004. "Syntax of the hell: Two types of dependencies." In *NELS 34* 1:279–294. ● **Lee**, T. T.-M. 2017. "Defocalization in Cantonese right dislocation." *Gengo Kenkyu* 152:59–87. ● **Wilder**, C. 1999. "Right Node Raising and the LCA." In *WCCFL 18*, 586–598. ● **Yip**, K.-F. 2025. "A unified biclausal approach to right dislocation in Chinese." Ms., Yale University. https://lingbuzz.net/lingbuzz/007912