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WH-QUESTIONS AND FOCUS*

0. INTRODUCTION

It has been argued over the years that the wh-phrase in a wh-question functions as the focus of the question. In this paper I argue that this is true only in a very small number of cases (such as echo-questions) and that in all other cases the focus of the question lies elsewhere. The analysis of focus in questions presented here will then be shown to enable explanations for the following phenomena: (1) the possibility of questioning in particular cases; (2) stress in questions and (3) scope in multiple wh-questions.

Why is it then that some linguists believe that wh-phrases *do* function as focus or new information? The main reason seems to be a confusion between the function of the wh-phrase in the question and the function of the constituent which replaces it in the answer. No one would disagree that the focus in the answers of the following exchange must necessarily be *Jack*:

- (7) Q: Who gave the book to Mary?
 A: Jack gave the book to Mary.
 Jack did.
 Jack.

Regardless of whether the answer is a full one or an abbreviated one, the constituent which fills in for the wh-phrase (in this case *Jack*) will be assigned focus status by everyone (whether the notion *focus* is used or some other parallel expression such as *new*). However, it does not seem to me that it in any way follows from this that the function of the wh-phrase in the question must also be assigned focus status. Rochemont (1978) argues that the unacceptability of the following (his (78b) and (79b)) follows from the focus status of the wh-phrase:

- (8) *Who did you see in the Collegian a picture of?
- (9) *Which book did John notice yesterday an article in?

- (24) 1
 (a) Who gave a book to Mary?
 dom
 1
 (b) Who gave a book to Mary?
 dom
 1
 (c) Who gave a book to Mary?
 dom
 1
 (d) Who gave a book to Mary?
 dom
 2 1
 (e) Who ⟨gave a book to Mary⟩?
 dom
 2 1
 (f) ⟨Who gave a book to Mary⟩?
 dom

The answer to all these variations of the question could in all cases be *Bill*, but the context of the question itself will vary in each case.

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