NOMI ERTESCHIK-SHIR

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 necessarilly 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?

for the DELPH-IN summit

(24) 1

(a) Who gave a book to Mary?

1

(b) Who gave a book to Mary?

1

(c) Who gave a book to Mary?

J

(d) Who gave a book to Mary?

2

(e) Who (gave a book to Mary)?

do

ho gave a book to Mary

(f) (Who gave a book to Mary)?

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.

for the DELPH-IN summit Cambridge, UK

The same adjacency requirement is also observed with *wh*-elements. As (31) illustrates, every *wh*-element (except for *miért* 'why') has to be immediately preverbal. So sentence adverbs can precede the *wh*-element, or follow the verb, but they cannot intervene between the two:

(31) Mari 'valószínűleg/'hirtelen mit *valószínűleg/*hirtelen tett
Mary probably/suddenly what-acc probably/suddenly put
'valószínűleg/hirtelen a kávéjába.
probably/suddenly the coffee-her-loc
'What did Mary probably/suddenly put in her coffee?'
(based on Horvath 1986: 102, ex. 23)

A final property of focus movement that is also displayed by wh-movement is that it licenses parasitic gaps. This is illustrated for Hungarian in (56): (56a, b) show that wh-movement and focus movement license parastic gaps, while (56c, d) show that scrambling or topic movement do not:

- (56) a. Mit. dobott ki Péter t, anélkül hogy elolvasott volna t,? what-acc threw prt Peter without that prt-read be-irreal 'What did Peter file without reading?'
 - b. Fontos iratokat, dobott ki Péter t_i anélkül hogy important documents-acc threw prt Peter without that elolvasott volna t. prt-read be-irreal 'It was important documents that Peter filed without reading.'

for the DELPH-IN summit Cambridge, UK

- c. Kidobott fontos iratokat_i Péter t_i anélkül hogy elolvasott threw-prt important documents-acc Peter without that prt-read volna t_i. be-irreal
 - 'Peter filed important documents without reading (them).'
- d. *Fontos iratokat <u>Péter</u>; dobott ki anélkül hogy elolvasott important documents-acc Peter threw prt without that prt-read volna t_i.

 be-irreal

'Peter filed important documents without reading (them).'

Horvath (2000: 197) showed that the parallelism between pied-piping in focus and wh does not go all the way in Hungarian. In particular, the wh-feature cannot be pied-piped from an object onto the participial clause (79a–b). Nevertheless, focus interpretation of the structurally parallel object in (79c) is allowed. This, she suggests, indicates that a different treatment for focus and wh is necessary in the grammar:

- (79) a. *az ital amit követelő vendégektől fél a pincér the drink which-acc demanding guests-loc fears the waiter 'the drink customers demanding which the waiter is afraid of . . .'
 - b. *Mit követelő vendégektől fél a pincér t? what-acc demanding guests-loc fears the waiter 'Customers demanding what is the waiter afraid of?'
 - Barackpálinkát követelő vendégektől fél a pincér. apricot-brandy-acc demanding guests-loc fears the waiter

 'It is customers demanding apricot brandy that the waiter is afraid of.'

3.4.3 Left-peripheral vs. right-peripheral focus in Italian

Rizzi claims that the left-peripheral focus can be distinguished from a lower, right-peripheral focus position described in detail by Calabrese (1982), Cinque (1993), Belletti and Shlonsky (1995), and Samek-Lodovici (1996).

One of the characteristics of the left-peripheral focus is that it is not appropriate as an answer to a question indicating non-contrastive new information. Rather, it is allowed as a correction, as in (75) (Rizzi 1997: 5):¹⁵

- (75) a. A: Che cosa hai letto? What thing have-you read 'What did you read?'
 - B: #<u>Il tuo libro</u> ho letto. the his book have-I read 'I read your book.'
 - b. A: Gianni ma dice che hai letto il suo libro.

 John to-me said that have-you read the his book

 'John told me that you read his book.'
 - B: Il tuo libro ho letto (, non il suo) the his book have-I read not the his 'I read your book, not his.'