A syntactic account of \( wh \)-in-situ in Turkish

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1. Introduction

Generative studies have revealed that \( wh \)-phrases are licensed under the Spec-Head configuration in CP. In a \( wh \)-movement language like English, for instance, the topmost \( wh \)-phrase undergoes obligatory overt movement to the head of the sentence, namely Spec,CP. In recent terms, the movement of the \( wh \)-phrase is triggered by the checking/agreeing requirement of the uninterpretable \( wh \)-feature (\( u[wh] \)) of interrogative C. Turkish, on the other hand, is a genuine \( wh \)-in-situ language where no movement is required for any \( wh \)-phrase, in neither matrix nor embedded clauses, neither in single nor in multiple questions. Although this property of Turkish \( wh \)-phrases has not been exhaustively discussed in the literature, there are studies of Turkish that follow the generative literature on \( wh \)-in-situ. For Akar (1990), Turkish \( wh \)-phrases undergo LF-movement to Spec,CP, conforming to Huang’s (1982) LF \( wh \)-movement analysis. Özsoy (1996) also subscribes to LF-movement analysis, applying Nishigauchi’s (1990) pied-piping LF-movement account to \( wh \)-in-situ in Turkish. In contrast, following the \( wh \)-indexing analysis of Aoun and Li (1993), Arslan (1999) advocates a non-movement account à la Baker (1970), which states that a question operator base generated in Spec,CP unselectively binds all in situ \( wh \)-variables in the sentence.

The present study, on the other hand, aims to show that Turkish \( wh \)-in-situ calls for a syntactic movement account. It will be argued that when its close interaction with focus is taken into account, \( wh \)-in-situ favors a syntactic operator-movement analysis, first proposed by Watanabe (1992) for Japanese.

The organization of the paper is as follows: in Section 2, it will be shown that Turkish \( wh \)-in-situ exhibits movement effects in overt syntax; Section 3 deals with the interactions between focus and \( wh \)-in-situ. The proposal is spelt out in Section 4, and Section 5 concludes the study.

2. Diagnostics of movement

One of the diagnostics of movement is the locality effects displayed by phrases undergoing movement out of syntactic islands, violating Subjacency. (1), taken from Watanabe (2003, p. 205), shows that overt \( wh \)-movement out of islands exhibits locality effects in English:

\[
\begin{align*}
(1) \quad a. \quad & \text{Who is he reading a book that criticizes } t \, ? \quad \text{(complex NP island)} \\
& \text{b.} \quad & \text{What do you remember where we bought } t \, ? \quad \text{(} \text{wh-island})
\end{align*}
\]
If in situ wh-phrases involve movement at LF as suggested by the LF wh-movement account, we expect that locality effects would be displayed for such constructions as well. In fact, locality effects are the major piece of evidence for the movement of wh-phrases in situ in Turkish. Consider the examples in (2) taken from Özsoy (1996, p. 139):

(2)  
a. Kim-in yaz-dığ-ı mektub-u oku-du-n?  
who.GEN write-VN.acc-POSS letter.PAST-2SG

"Who did you read [the letter [i wrote]]?"

b. *Adam-n neden yaz-dığ-ı mektup uzun?  
man.GEN why write-VN.acc-POSS letter long

"Why is [the letter [the man wrote [t]]] long?"

a’. LF: [CP kimin, [NP [CP tı yazdıgı] mektubu] okudun?


As seen in the LF representations of the sentences in (2), although an argument wh-phrase can be extracted out of a complex NP island at LF, an adjunct wh-phrase cannot. Further, as shown in (3), wh-islands (cf. (3)a) and adjunct islands (cf. (3)b), too, display locality effects for extraction of adjunct wh-phrases:

(3)  
M.NOM A.GEN when come-GER come-NEG-VN.acc-POSS-ACC ask-PAST.3SG

"When did Murat ask [whether Ali come when]?"

b. *[Bulaşık-ları nasıl yıka-ma-dan] TV seyred-iyor-sun?  
dish-PL-ACC how wash-NEG-GER TV watch-PROG-2SG

"How come you are watching TV without doing the dishes __?"

(Özsoy, 1996, p. 150)

The next question is whether the movement in question takes place at overt syntax or at LF. Discussing the issue in Japanese, Watanabe (2003) shows that Japanese wh-in-situ displays a blocking effect that wh-clauses have for another type of A'-movement, called Comparative Deletion (CD). Following Kikuchi (1987), who suggests that CD is derived by movement in overt syntax, he shows that CD in Japanese is sensitive to a wh-island (cf. (4)). On the other hand, the embedded clause in (5) cannot block CD:

(4)  
everyone-NOM why Paul-NOM read C0 want-to-know than John-NOM

takusan-no hon-o yonda.  
many-GEN book-ACC read

"John read more books than everyone wants to know why Paul read."

(5)  
everyone-NOM Paul-NOM read Q rumors than John-NOM

takusan-no hon-o yonda.  
many-GEN book-ACC read

"John read more books than everyone rumors that Paul read."
Notice that as each of the embedded clauses in (4) and (5) functions as a declarative clause, the ungrammaticality of the one in (4) is unexpected. Watanabe (2003, p. 211) states that “[i]f wh-in-situ launches an invisible operator in overt syntax, …, we can expect the wh-island effect created by the embedded question [in (4)]. Thus, we are led to conclude that wh-questions in Japanese involve overt movement.”

(6) shows that Turkish wh-in-situ displays the same wh-island effect in CD:

   J N G P N N N N
   think-NOM-ABL more book read-PROG-3SG
   “John reads more books than everyone thinks why Paul read.”

   “John reads more books than everyone thinks that Paul read.”

If Watanabe is on the right track, we can conclude that Turkish wh-in-situ involves overt movement, too. Therefore, following Görgülü (2006) who suggests that Turkish wh-phrases are variables, and Watanabe (1992, 2003) for operator-movement analysis of wh-in-situ, I will suggest that Turkish wh-phrases in situ have a null operator in their Spec, which undergoes movement in overt syntax. I assume that the structure of a wh-phrase in Turkish is as shown in (7):

(7) [NP Op [N wh-word]]

3. Focus - wh-in-situ interactions

Having discussed the movement effects displayed by Turkish wh-in-situ, let us see the interactions between focus and wh-phrases. As seen in (8) a-b, Turkish wh-phrases in single wh-constructions are obligatorily marked by focus accent, displaying the close interaction between focus and wh-phrases. Because wh-phrases have to carry the focus accent in such constructions, they are banned in the post-verbal area, as seen in (8) a’-b’, which is a de-stressed field in Turkish (Göksel, 1998; Kural, 1992 among others): 2

   T N N N N N
   ’Who did Tamer see?’

b. Tamer NERE-YE/*nereye git-ti? b’. *Tamer t_l git-ti NERE-YE_l?
   T N N N N N
   ’Where did Tamer go?’

On the other hand, as noted by Göksel and Özsoy (2000), a wh-phrase can be unmarked for focus provided that it occurs inside the focus field. They define focus field as the area where non-recoverable information is presented. Structurally, focus field is marked by the verb and the focus-accented phrase on the right and left-hand sides, respectively. Regarding the order between a focus-accented phrase (“F” or “WH” in (9)) and a wh-phrase (“wh” in
(9) in a sentence, they state that the following patterns emerge in Turkish (focus field is marked by “| … |”):

(9) a. *wh … | F … V |   c. | F … wh … V |
    b. *wh … | WH … V |   d. | WH … wh … V |

(adopted from Göksel & Özsoy, 2000)

According to the writers, (9)a-b are impossible because in these patterns wh-phrases conveying non-recoverable information are out of the focus field. (10), taken from Göksel and Özsoy (2000, pp. 222-223), shows the examples for the patterns in (9):

(10) a. *Kim SEN-i sev-iyor? (cf. (9)a - *wh … F)
    who.NOM you-ACC love-PROG.3SG
    ‘Who loves YOU?’

    b. *Kim KİM-i sev-iyor-muş? (cf. (9)b - *wh … WH)
    who.NOM who-ACC love-PROG-EV.3SG
    ‘Who loves who?’

    c. SEN-i kim sev-iyor? (cf. (9)c - F … wh)
    you-ACC who.NOM love-PROG.3SG
    ‘Who loves YOU?’

    d. KİM-kim-i sev-iyor-muş? (cf. (9)d - WH … wh)
    who NOM who-ACC love-PROG-EV.3SG
    ‘WHO loves who?’

However, the judgments of my informants as well my own are the reverse for the multiple wh-constructions in (10)b and (d). According to these judgments, (10)b is perfect, and (10)d is grammatical only with echo-question reading, which is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, it may be that we have two dialects for the issue at hand. Whatever the reason is, I will here stick to the judgments of my informants, leaving the issue for further research. Therefore, for the purposes of the present study, I would like to revise (9) as shown in (11):

(11) a. *wh … F … V   c. F … wh … V
    b. wh … WH … V   d. */WH … wh … V

In what follows, I would like to propose a syntactic account for the patterns in (11), suggesting that the issue in question has to do with the syntactic licensing of wh-in-situ, in contrast to the “focus field” account drawing on the conception of “non-recoverable information”.

4. Proposal

Considering the close interaction between focus and wh-in-situ, a natural question to be asked is whether Turkish wh-words have any intrinsic property that attracts focus accent. Although this is not an easy question at this stage, the patterns in (11)b-c seem to suggest
that the answer is negative because they show that wh-phrases can do without focus accent. This appears to confirm Surányi (2007), who states that the focus feature ([+foc]) is not an inherent property of wh-phrases in Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian and Japanese but is a feature that they can be associated with in the Numeration. If this is correct, we have reason to believe that the interaction between focus and wh-in-situ may not be due to a phonological constraint.³

We must also ask whether the grammaticality contrast between (11)b and (d) has anything to do with LF. This is not likely to be the reason either, because, as we have discussed before, Turkish wh-in-situ exhibits movement effects in overt syntax. These are the reasons that call for a syntactic account of wh-in-situ in Turkish.

4.1 The syntax of wh-in-situ in multiple wh-constructions

Considering the movement effects exhibited by wh-in-situ and its close relationship with focus, I suggest that focus interacts with wh-in-situ in overt syntax in Turkish. In particular, I propose that the contrast between (11)b and (d) can be accounted for if we assume a syntactic licenser for focus in the low IP area. Following Belletti (2004), I assume a low Focus Projection (FocP) above vP in Turkish where focused elements including focused wh-phrases are licensed. Now, to see the derivation of the pattern with grammatical multiple wh-construction we have seen in (11)b, consider (12):³

(12) a. Tamer ne-yi NERE-YE koy-du?
   T.NOM what-ACC where-DAT put-PAST.3SG
   'What did Tamer put where?'

b.
Here, Foc^0 attracts the lowest wh-phrase nereye ‘where’, since this is the only item in the derivation which has the [+foc] feature. This movement obeys Minimality because the highest wh-phrase neyi ‘what’ is invisible to Foc^0. Under Saito’s (2003) revised version of Chomsky’s (1993) copy theory of movement, a copy of the wh-phrase nereye ‘where’ moves to Spec,FocP to check the u[foc] feature of Foc^0, and the phonological features and referential D-features of the wh-phrase are deleted in the higher copy, since they are selected at the lower copy. After feature deletion applies, only the [+wh] and [+foc] features are retained at the higher copy. Note that these are interpretive features, which I assume, following Boeckx (2003), do not undergo deletion under feature checking. One important consequence of this movement which concerns us here is that the operator of the moved wh-phrase nereye ‘where’ stays with the higher copy in Spec,FocP, since the lower copy is not in an operator position. Here I follow Saito who suggests that features are retained where they are selected, and all the other material in the copy must move with it.

In the next step, at the point where C^0 is merged, the u[wh] feature of C^0 attracts the operator of the closest phrase with the feature [+wh] to its Spec. Accordingly, the operator of the wh-phrase nereye ‘where’, which is now closest to C^0, moves to Spec,CP from where it unselectively binds (à la Reinhart, 1998) both wh-variables in its scope. The scope of the wh-operator is descriptively defined here as the area where the movement of the operator occurs. Namely, in (12), the scope of the operator undergoing movement (Op_j) is the area between the position of the lowest copy of the wh-phrase nereye ‘where’ and the highest position where the operator has landed, i.e. the area between the complement of V^0 and Spec,CP.

Notice that the focus-movement of the lowest wh-phrase creates the anti-superiority effect observed in languages like Japanese. Watanabe (1992) proposes that Anti-Superiority is a principle in the syntax of wh-in-situ in Japanese, which states that the operator of a wh-phrase cannot move if it c-commands another wh-phrase. However, under the present account there is no need to stipulate a principle like Anti-superiority in Turkish, thanks to focus movement of the lowest wh-phrase in situ, which inverts the order of wh-phrases. Thus, the focus-driven movement account of wh-in-situ proposed here does the job for which the Anti-superiority principle was originally designed.

Turning to the ungrammatical case in (11), it is the highest wh-phrase neyi ‘what’ that has the [+foc] feature. As seen in (13)b the derivation proceeds similar to (12), but the sentence is ungrammatical. The reason is that the variable of the lowest wh-phrase nereye ‘where’ fails to be bound, since it is beyond the scope of the operator of the object wh-phrase neyi ‘what’ that moved to Spec,CP. Thus, the ungrammaticality of the sentence stems from having an unbound wh-variable in the derivation.

(13) a. */"?Tamer ne-y1 nere-ye koy-du?
   T.NOM what-ACC where-DAT put-PAST.3SG
   'What did Tamer put where?'

   operator scope
4.2 Non-focused wh-phrases in single wh-constructions

The ungrammaticality of the single wh-construction (11)a, exemplified in (10)a and repeated in (14)a below, can also be accounted for by the proposed analysis. As shown in (14)b, Foc′ attracts a copy of the DP seni ‘you’, as this is the phrase that carries the focus feature. After feature deletion applies, the [+foc] feature of the item is retained at the higher copy. At the point where the interrogative C0 merges with the structure, the operator of the subject wh-phrase is attracted to Spec,CP because it is the closest phrase with the [+wh] feature. The question, then, is what prevents the licensing of wh-in-situ. Beck (1996), Beck and Kim (1997), and Kim (2002), among others, propose that intervening quantifiers and focus phrases block the licensing of wh-in-situ in languages such as German, Korean and Japanese. It seems that the [+foc] feature in Spec,FocP in (14) introduces a similar intervention effect in Turkish as well. Although a detailed analysis of intervention effects in Turkish is needed, here we can say that the intervention effect in question could follow from a violation of Rizzi’s (1990) relativized minimality, according to which the intervener [+foc] feature in Spec,FocP can be regarded as the potential antecedent governor to the trace/copy of the null wh-operator that moves to Spec,CP, thereby yielding a Minimality violation. Notice that the intervention effect disappears if the subject wh-phrase is focused, as shown in (15):

\[
\begin{align*}
(14) & \text{a. } *\text{Kim } \text{SEN-l } \text{seviyor?} \\
& \text{who.NOM } \text{you-ACC } \text{love-PROG.3SG} \\
& \text{`Who loves YOU?’} \\
& \text{b. } \text{[CP TP [FocP [IP [VP ]]]] } \\
& \text{Op} \quad \text{[SEN-l]_\text{foc}} \quad [\text{Op, Kim}_{\text{whh}}] \quad [\text{SEN-l}_{\text{foc}}] \quad \text{seviyor?}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(15) & \text{a. } \text{KIM } \text{SEN-i } \text{seviyor?} \\
& \text{who.NOM } \text{you-ACC } \text{love-PROG.3SG} \\
& \text{`WHO loves you?’} \\
& \text{b. } \text{Seni, KIM t } \text{seviyor?}
\end{align*}
\]

On the other hand, if the pattern in (11)a is ungrammatical because of the intervention effect induced by the [+foc] feature in Spec,FocP, the pattern in (11)c, exemplified in (10)c and repeated in (16), raises a question. The question is why the focused object DP in this sentence does not introduce intervention effects although it does when it follows the wh-phrase as we have seen in (10)a/(14). First, as can be observed from (17), the scrambled object DP seni ‘you’ contrasts with other referents in the context set. Therefore, (10)c/(16) can be uttered only when there is such a contrast in the context:

\[
\begin{align*}
(16) & \text{SEN-l } \text{kim } \text{seviyor?} \\
& \text{you-ACC } \text{who.NOM } \text{love-PROG.3SG} \\
& \text{`Who loves YOU?’}
\end{align*}
\]

Throughout the paper, small capitals will be used to mark focus-accented phrases.
3 Alternatively, if one assumes that the [+focus] feature does not need to attract sentential stress but has to be interpreted in the ‘focus field’, the idea that this feature is intrinsic to wh-phrases can be maintained. This may explain the grammaticality of the pattern in (11)c, but not the ungrammaticality of (11)d. Thus, the notion of ‘focus field’ may be relevant, but, clearly, it needs a much deeper analysis. I leave this for future research and stick with the idea that wh-phrases do not have intrinsic [+focus] features for the rest of the paper.

4 In the literature there are a lot of languages reported where wh-phrases are licensed either directly or indirectly by focus, including Hungarian (Brody, 1990; Horváth, 1986; Surányi, 2007), Bulgarian (Bošković, 2000, 2002), Serbo-Croatian (Stjepanović, 1999), Russian (Stepanov, 1998), Romanian (Göbbel, 1998), French (Cheng & Rooryck, 2000) Japanese (Deguchi & Kitagawa, 2002; Ishihara, 2004; Yanagida, 1996) and so on.

5 I assume that the subject stays in Spec,vP, although this does not necessarily concern the analysis here. For a recent discussion concerning the position of the subject in Turkish, see Öztürk (2005).

6 In Rizzi’s (1997) split-CP system, FocP is “inside” the CP having been sandwiched by topic phrases (TopP). For convenience, it is shown in (18) as a separate projection, neglecting the whole array of the split-CP system.

References


Kim, S.-S. (2002). Intervention effects are focus effects. In N. Akatsuka & S. Strauss (Eds.), Japanese/Korean Linguistics (pp. 615-628), vol. 10. Stanford: CSLI.


