Restrictions on Wh-in-situ in Kavalan and Amis

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There are two competing approaches that aim to explain whether an interrogative subject can stay in-situ in Austronesian languages. According to Richards (1998) and Sabel (2003), a wh-phrase cannot occupy the subject position in Tagalog and Malagasy. They suggest that the so-called subjects in Austronesian languages are topics, which must be definite or specific and are thus incompatible with the semantics of a wh-phrase. Law (2006), however, claims that as long as a wh-subject can be formally marked in the same way as its non-interrogative counterpart, it can stay in-situ. Presenting the syntactic restrictions on the wh-in-situ constructions in Kavalan and Amis, two Austronesian languages in Taiwan, the present paper argues that no single approach is able to accommodate the empirical facts in both languages.

All wh-phrases in Amis, regardless of their grammatical function, can stay in-situ. This pattern conforms to Law's (2006) observation that wh-phrases in Austronesian languages can stay in-situ as long as they can receive the same formal marking as their non-interrogative counterparts. The crucial formal marking requirement in Amis is that the absolutive subject must take the overt absolutive case marker *ku* (for common nouns) or the non-common noun marker *ci*. The absolutive case marker can be attached to wh-phrases that inquire about non-human entities; the human interrogative phrase *cima* inherently takes the marker *ci*. Wh-phrases in the subject position in Amis can fulfill this formal requirement and are thus allowed to stay in-situ. This requirement on the formal marking of the subject can be explained by Landau's (2007) analysis of EPP. T in Amis has an EPP feature that selects for a phonologically overt D, so the subject in Spec, TP must be headed by an overt D, or otherwise the derivation would crash at PF.

However, Law's (2006) analysis cannot be extended to Kavalan, where interrogative phrases cannot stay in-situ in the subject position, except for *mayni=ay* 'which=REL'. The distribution of in-situ wh-phrases in Kavalan supports Richards's (1998) and Sabel's (2003) proposal. The absolutive subject in Kavalan is interpreted as definite and exhibits strong topic persistence (Huang and Tanankingsing 2011; Liao 2002). It is assigned an interpretable [op] feature and moves to Spec, TopP to check the uninterpretable [op] feature on Top. A wh-phrase in the absolutive subject position cannot meet this requirement and thus the derivation of a sentence with an absolutive wh-phrase crashes at LF.

The reason why the wh-phrase headed by *mayni=ay* 'which=REL' can stay in-situ in the subject position is due to its D(iscourse)-linking status. I argue that the distinction between D-linking and non-D-linking in Kavalan is a syntactic phenomenon. One noticeable difference between a D-linked wh-phrase and a non-D-linked wh-phrase in Kavalan is that the former takes an additional marker *=ay* and forms a modification structure with its following noun. The marker *=ay* functions to introduce diverse kinds of modifiers of a noun. Following den Dikken and Singhapreecha's (2004) approach to

modification structure, I propose that the modification maker =*ay* heads a functional projection FP and triggers DP-internal Predicate Inversion, which results in the syntactic structure of restrictive modification. As an interrogative, *mayni* 'which' introduces a free variable *x* into the derivation. Moreover, the domain of this free variable is restricted by the subject NP in the small clause. In Kavalan, it is this syntactic configuration of restrictive modification that contributes to the D-linking interpretation of a wh-phrase. Due to its D-linking status, *mayni*-phrase can move to Spec, TopP to check the uninterpretable [op] feature on Top and stay in-situ in the subject position.

This analysis is corroborated by the patterns of in-situ *zanitiana* 'whose' and *tani* 'how many'. Although *zanitiana* 'whose' is not allowed in the subject position, its grammaticality does improve if it occurs in the =*ay* construction. By contrast, although *tani* 'how many' seems to be an interrogative modifier of a noun, it cannot take the modification marker =*ay*. This suggests that the structure of a noun phrase with *tani* 'how many' differs from the modification structure of *mayni*=*ay* 'which=REL'. It is not derived via DP-internal Predicate Inversion induced by the linker. Therefore, an in-situ *tani*-phrase in the subject position is ungrammatical regardless of the presence of =*ay*.

Austronesian languages do not all exhibit the same wh-in-situ patterns and no single approach can capture the different empirical constraints in Kavalan and Amis. The wh-in-situ patterns in Kavalan further suggest that the D-linking status of a wh-phrase can determine whether it can stay in-situ and that D-linking results from a specific syntactic structure.

References

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