

Focus fronting vs *wh*-movement: Evidence from Sardinian

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It is a commonly held view that focus fronting exhibits similar properties to *wh*-movement (Chomsky 1976, Brody 1995, Rizzi 1997). The syntactic parallelism between the two types of movement has been further supported by the analyses of *wh*-questions that assume that, when functioning as interrogative operators, *wh*-words are inherently focal (see, e.g., Beck 2006, Cable 2010). The main goal of this talk is to challenge this highly attractive picture regarding the relationship between *wh*-words, focus, and movement. My starting point will be Jones's (1993) comparison between fronted foci and *wh*-items in Sardinian.

Sardinian features an extensive use of focus-fronting, which is not limited to a contrastive interpretation as in other Romance languages. This allows us to compare more closely and carefully the two types of movement. Jones (1993: 333–334) lists a number of common properties: (a) adjacency between fronted item and the verb; (b) the order with respect to left-dislocated phrases; (c) uniqueness (i.e. movement can only apply to one element within the same clause); (d) incompatibility with preverbal subjects and with the interrogative particle 'a'. Moreover, fronted foci and *wh*-items are mutually exclusive (cf. 1):

- (1) a. *A kie **su jocátulu** as datu?
 to whom the toy have.2SG given
 b. ***Su jocátulu** a kie as datu?
 the toy to whom have.2SG given
 'To whom did you give the toy?'

Most of these properties, as hypothesized by Jones, can be accounted for by postulating that both types of movement target the same functional projection in the left periphery of the clause (see Rizzi 1997 for a later development of this idea). However, clear differences distinguish the two types of movement. First of all, unlike fronted foci, *wh*-items do not bear *the nuclear pitch accent* of the sentence. Secondly, fronted foci and *wh*-items exhibit a different behaviour in embedded contexts: for example, as in Italian (Rizzi 2001) and in other Romance languages, *wh*-items are incompatible with a narrow focus in direct questions, but not in indirect questions (cf. 2).

- (2) Mi so dimandande **a Juanne** itte appan natu (, no a Paulu).
me be.1sg ask.GER to Juanne what had.3PL said not to Paulu
'I'm wondering what they said to Juanne (, not Paulu).'

In this talk I will concentrate on these differences. I will present the results of a prosodic experiment confirming Jones's intuitions about the different prosodic pattern of *wh*-questions, and undermining the received 'isomorphism' between focus fronting and *wh*-movement.

In order to account for the prosodic mismatch and for the asymmetry between direct and indirect questions, I follow Bianchi et al.'s (2017) analysis of *wh*-questions, according to which interrogative *wh*-words are not inherently focal. Their apparent focal status, which is considered to be the cause of their incompatibility with a narrow focus in (1), is due to the interpretive requirement that *direct* *wh*-questions require a congruent answer, and hence disallow an independent focus structure. This constraint is syntactically implemented by the assumption that the features [wh] and [focus] are necessarily bundled on a root C, which probes for the *wh*-phrase. On the other hand, the [wh] and the [focus] feature need not be bundled in *indirect* *wh*-questions, which do not require a congruent answer: this allows *wh*-

items and fronted foci to co-occur in embedded contexts (cf. 2). As for prosody, I assume that the *wh*-phrase only matches the [wh] feature of the complex probe in C, but it does not bear [focus]; hence, it does not qualify for the assignment of the nuclear pitch accent, contrary to the [focus]-marked phrase that moves in the case of focus fronting.

References

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