

Restriction on in-situ *wh*-phrases in Malagasy, Tagalog and Tsou

In Malagasy and Tagalog, an extractable *wh*-phrase may not remain in postverbal position where its non-*wh*-phrase counterpart can appear (cf. *sino ang bumili ng libro?*, *iza no nividy ny boky?* ‘who bought the book?’ vs *bumili ang lalaki/*sino ng libro(?)*, *nividy ny boky ny lehilany/*iza(?)* ‘who/the man bought the book(?)’) (Richards 1998 for Tagalog and Sabel 2002 for Malagasy), while Tsou (an Austronesian language spoken by around three-thousand speakers on Mount Ali, Taiwan) has both options (cf. *m-o m-hin-o to tpos# na sia/oko(?)* ‘who/some child bought a book(?)). We argue that the restriction on in-situ *wh*-phrases is reducible to an independent formal constraint on the position occupied by the argument that correlates with verbal morphology. We show that *wh*-phrases can occur where the constraint fails to hold.

The restriction on in-situ *wh*-phrases in Malagasy and Tagalog has been attributed by Richards and Sabel to the argument in the postverbal subject/topic/trigger (Schachter 1995) position (henceforth *st*-position) being interpreted as definite (Schachter and Otnes 1972 for Tagalog, Keenan 1976 for Malagasy). As *wh*-phrases are not definite, it then follows that they are excluded from appearing in *st*-position. The explanation is problematic in two respects. First, in Tagalog the argument in *st*-position actually need not be interpreted as definite (cf. *darating bukas ang isang babaeng nakilala ko sa probinsya* ‘a woman is coming tomorrow who I met in the provinces’, Adams and Manaster-Ramer 1988). In fact, the non-self-contradicting example *dumating ng maaga ang ibang bisita at dumating ng huli ang ibang bisita* ‘many guests arrived early, and many guests arrived late’ shows that the argument in *st*-position is not necessarily understood to be definite. Second, the explanation does not explain why *wh*-phrases, being neither definite nor indefinite, may occur in a position where a definite or infinite argument may appear (cf. *bumili si Jose ng libro/ano(?)* ‘Jose bought a/the book/what(?)’). If the *st*-position is subject to a formal constraint to the effect that the argument occupying it carry the *ang*-marker. A *wh*-phrase thus may appear in positions just where the *ang*-marker is not required (cf. *maestro/sino ang lalaki(?)* ‘who/the man is a teacher(?)’). The requirement is trivially met when the *st*-position is not occupied by an overt category, as in the case of overt extraction.

The predicate *ano* ‘what’ may be ‘definitized’ by a preceding *ang* (cf. *(ang) ano ba ang nasunog?* ‘what got burned?’, Schachter and Otnes 1972:507-509), but *sino* ‘who’ may not (cf. *(*ang) sino ang dumating?* ‘who came?’). It is therefore no surprise that *ang ano* may occur in *st*-position while *ang sino* may not (cf. *nasunog ang ano?* ‘what got burned?’ vs **dumating ang sino?* ‘who came?’). It must be pointed out, however, that cases where *ang ano* appears in the postverbal *st*-position may very well be echo questions, as they cannot be embedded under a predicate requiring a constituent question complement (cf. *hindi ko alam kung ano ang nasugnog* vs **hindi ko alam kung nasunog ang ano* ‘I don’t know what got burned?’).

The relation between in-situ *wh*-phrases and the general constraint on the argument in *st*-position is most transparent in Malagasy and Tsou. On the one hand, in Malagasy the argument occupying *st*-position must be marked with *ny* (cf. *nividy (ny) boky *(ny) lehilahy* ‘the man bought the book’). *Wh*-phrases, not being marked by *ny*, are thus excluded in that position. In other positions where *ny* is not required a *wh*-phrase may occur (cf. *nividy inona ny lehilahy* ‘what did the man buy?’, *mpianatra/inona i Rabe(?)* ‘Rabe is a student/what(?)’). On the other hand, in Tsou arguments are generally preceded by a marker indicating whether the referent of the argument is known/visible to the speaker/hearer (Szakos 1994). As a *wh*-phrase may be preceded by the marker *na*, the same marker for a non *wh*-phrase argument in *st*-position whose referent is unknown to the speaker, it is therefore possible for it to occur in the same position.