

## Focus and Congruency in Tagalog Questions and Answers

Literature in Philippine linguistics has consistently observed a correlation in the structure of wh-questions and the structure of felicitous answers to those questions. Specifically, a question like (1a) has a felicitous response in (1b). In example (1b), the constituent that answers the wh-question is located at the left-periphery, and the verbal morphology matches the question<sup>1</sup>. The question also has (1c) as a felicitous response where the verbal morphology simply matches. Conversely, while the responses in (1d) and (1e) are judged to be grammatical utterances, they are infelicitous answers to the question. Descriptively, Kroeger (1993:63) notes mismatched pairs like the question in (1a) and the responses in (1d)/(1e) are less than optimal because "...of a preference for the voice marking of the verb in the answer to be parallel to that in the question whenever possible."

Such a correlation demands formal explanation, and Kroeger (1993:61-62) establishes that connection by asserting that the left-dislocated configurations bear focus, a structure that provides the crucial new information to answer the question. The structural configuration of the wh-question and the left-dislocation structure are very tightly linked. Mercado (2003) also showed that this left-periphery configuration induces a focus reading on the constituent<sup>2</sup>. Thus, only (1b) and (1c) are felicitous responses to the question in (1a) because either the answer to the question is in focus, or there is no focus at all. Example (1d) and (1e) are infelicitous because focus has been misapplied to a constituent that is not an answer to the question.

However, no account of this data yet establishes the formal connection between the *meaning* of the question and the *meanings* of the felicitous answers. The formal account for why the question and answer pairs match up the way they do lies in the notion of congruent answers (Groenendijk and Stokhof 1984 and von Stechow 1990). The (b) and (c) examples provide congruent answers to the questions in (a) whereas the answers in (d) and (e) do not. The structured meaning approach of Krifka (2001 and 2004) is one of two major approaches to questions in the formal semantics literature (the other approach is the proposition set account). The structured meaning account is chosen for this analysis because it very transparently connects the intuitions about the meanings of questions to focus structures in answers.

Under the structured meaning approach, the meanings of questions are functions that yield a proposition when applied to their answer. Wh-words require answers from a specific domain (restriction) – "who" requires that the answer generally be a person, "where" requires a place, and so on. Krifka adopts a bi-partite structure for answers that includes the truth-function (background) and the domain restriction:  $\langle \text{BACKGROUND}, \text{RESTRICTION} \rangle$ . The background is essentially a lambda-abstract over the argument that asked for while the domain restricts the type of entity expected. The formalization of the question appears in (2a).

Under this model, focus structures can also be accounted for. Focus partitions the semantic content into the same bi-partite structure containing a background and a focus:  $\langle \text{B}, \text{F} \rangle$ . The background is a lambda abstract over the argument in focus, while the focus is naturally the item in focus. The Tagalog answers are formalized in (2b)-(2e).

Congruent question-answer pairs here are defined as follows:

- i. The background of the question and the answer must be the same
- ii. The focus of the answer must be an element of the restriction of the question.

Crucially, the structured meaning approach classifies both (2d) and (2e) as instances of incongruent answers. However, the approach actually is also able to differentiate between the examples in terms of *why* those answers are incongruent. Example (2d) is incongruent because it has focused the wrong argument position expected by the question, and the answer given is not part of the restriction. Example (2e) actually satisfies the restriction requirement, but it focuses the wrong argument position.

The approach gives a satisfactory explanation of the data in question.

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<sup>1</sup> This structural configuration has been traditionally recognized as a form of 'topicalization'.

<sup>2</sup> Here, focus means indicating that the element in focus is more salient than a set of related alternatives (Rooth 1992). [Ferdinand]<sub>F</sub> bought the shoes. The bracketing with the subscript indicate that Ferdinand is in focus and was the one who bought shoes versus say José, Jun Jun, or Romero.

- (1) a. Sino ang b-um-ili-Ø ng sapatos para kay Imelda?  
 Who NOM buy.AV.PERF OBL shoes BEN Imelda?  
*'Who bought shoes for Imelda?'*
- <sup>3</sup>b. Si Ferdinand ang b-um-ili-Ø ng sapatos para kay Imelda.  
 NOM Ferdinand NOM buy.AV.PERF OBL shoes BEN Imelda.  
*'It was Ferdinand who bought shoes for Imelda.'*
- c. B-um-ili-Ø si Ferdinand ng sapatos para kay Imelda.  
 buy.AV.PERF NOM Ferdinand OBL shoes BEN Imelda.  
*'Ferdinand bought shoes for Imelda.'*
- d. #Ang sapatos ang b-in-ili-Ø ni Ferdinand para kay Imelda.  
 NOM shoes NOM buy.OV.PERF OBL Ferdinand BEN Imelda.  
*'It was (the) shoes that Ferdinand bought for Imelda.'*
- e. #Si Imelda ang b-in-ili-han ni Ferdinand ng sapatos.  
 NOM Imelda NOM buy.PERF.BV OBL Ferdinand OBL shoes.  
*'It was for Imelda that Ferdinand bought shoes.'*

(2)a.  $\llbracket 1a. \textit{Who bought shoes for Imelda?} \rrbracket = \langle \lambda x. [\text{BUY}(x, \text{SHOES}, \text{IMELDA})], \text{PERSON} \rangle$

### Congruent Answer

- b.  $\llbracket 1b \rrbracket = \langle \lambda x. [\text{BUY}(x, \text{SHOES}, \text{IMELDA})], \text{FERDINAND} \rangle$   
 The backgrounds match and the domain restriction is satisfied:  
 $\lambda x. [\text{BUY}(x, \text{SHOES}, \text{IMELDA})] = \lambda x. [\text{BUY}(x, \text{SHOES}, \text{IMELDA})]$   
 $\text{FERDINAND} \in \text{PERSON}$
- c.  $\llbracket 1c \rrbracket = \textit{Not a focus structure but the meaning is the same as the fully composed structured meaning of the question. BUY(FERDIDAND, SHOES, IMELDA)}$

### Incongruent Answers

- d.  $\llbracket 1d \rrbracket = \langle \lambda x. [\text{BUY}(\text{FERDINAND}, x, \text{IMELDA})], \text{SHOES} \rangle$   
 The backgrounds do not match, and the domain restriction is not met:  
 $\lambda x. [\text{BUY}(x, \text{SHOES}, \text{IMELDA})] \neq \lambda x. [\text{BUY}(\text{FERDINAND}, x, \text{IMELDA})]$   
 $\text{SHOES} \notin \text{PERSON}$
- e.  $\llbracket 1e \rrbracket = \langle \lambda x. [\text{BUY}(\text{FERDINAND}, \text{SHOES}, x)], \text{IMELDA} \rangle$   
 The backgrounds do not match, but the domain restriction is satisfied:  
 $\lambda x. [\text{BUY}(x, \text{SHOES}, \text{IMELDA})] \neq \lambda x. [\text{BUY}(\text{FERDINAND}, \text{SHOES}, x)]$   
 $\text{IMELDA} \in \text{PERSON}$

### Selected References

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<sup>3</sup> The left dislocated configuration tends to be more preferred as an answer than the basic configuration.