

Introduction

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Syntax, Semantics and Acquisition of Multiple Interrogatives: Who wants what?

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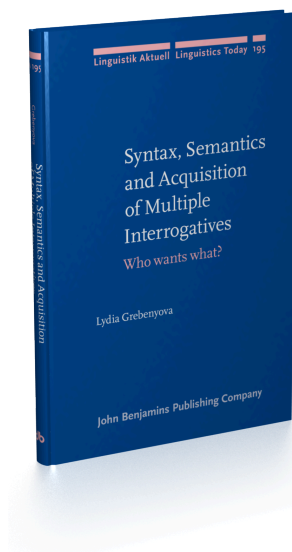
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Introduction

The goal of this study is to address issues in syntax, semantics and acquisition of multiple interrogatives. A multiple interrogative is an interrogative clause with more than one *wh*-phrase in it, as in an English example in (1). I will use the terms *multiple interrogative* and *multiple question* interchangeably to refer to such expressions.¹

- (1) Who bought what?

The book is organized as follows. In Chapter 1, I examine how T-to-C movement and semantics of multiple questions affect Superiority effects cross-linguistically. The novel generalization is that an asymmetry in Superiority effects between matrix and embedded multiple questions arises in languages that show an asymmetry in the availability of T-to-C movement in main vs. embedded clauses.

Adopting the Minimality account of Superiority of Chomsky (1995, 2000, 2001 and 2005), I argue that the presence of T-to-C movement relaxes Superiority effects in certain contexts. I present evidence for this hypothesis from a number of languages such as English, Icelandic, Brazilian Portuguese and Bulgarian. I also argue that the semantics of multiple questions, particularly the availability of Single-pair readings in bare multiple questions in a given language, crucially affects Superiority effects.

I conclude that what we know as Superiority effects reveals a complex interplay between syntactic and semantic factors such as minimality, T-to-C movement, and the interpretation of multiple questions. The analysis has consequences for clausal structure, nature of locality in syntax and the status of T-to-C movement in embedded clauses in English and in the grammar in general (i.e. whether T-to-C movement takes place in overt syntax or whether it is a PF phenomenon).

In Chapter 2, I explore the semantics of multiple interrogatives, focusing on the Pair-list (PL) and Single Pair (SP) readings in these structures. First, I examine the distribution of these readings in a variety of contexts, such as Superiority-obeying vs. Superiority-violating contexts, questions with bare vs. complex *wh*-phrases, local vs. long-distance multiple questions, and questions where the *wh*-phrases are separated by an island boundary.

1. The example in (1) is intended as an information question as opposed to a rhetorical question.

Since choosing the right tools for exploring the semantics of multiple interrogatives crucially depends on whether covert wh-movement exists, I explore the potential semantic and syntactic evidence for covert wh-movement and conclude that, if covert wh-movement exists, it must be motivated by a purely formal requirement. That is, there seems to be no semantic evidence for covert wh-movement. This conclusion leads me to use choice functions (not requiring covert wh-movement) in developing an account of the PL/SP readings distribution.

Adopting the compositional semantics of the PL/SP readings of Hagstrom (1998), I explore what is responsible for the cross-linguistic parameterization with respect to the availability of the SP readings in multiple questions with bare wh-phrases. I relate this parameterization to the selectional restrictions of the interrogative morpheme (Q-morpheme), which, I argue, vary across languages. I then account for the distribution of the PL/SP reading in the Superiority-obeying vs. Superiority-violating contexts, questions with bare vs. complex wh-phrases, local vs. long-distance multiple questions, and questions where the wh-phrases are separated by an island boundary.

In Chapter 3, I examine the behavior of multiple interrogatives under clausal ellipsis, known as *sluicing*, with the focus on the phenomenon known as *multiple sluicing*: clausal ellipsis with multiple remnants. Multiple sluicing is very productive in Slavic; therefore Chapter 3 focuses mainly on data from Slavic languages, particularly Bulgarian, Russian, Polish, and Serbo-Croatian. Contrary to the previous proposals that an interrogative +*wh* complementizer licenses TP-ellipsis, as in Lobeck (1995) and Merchant (2001), I argue that it is the +*focus* feature that is responsible for licensing this ellipsis operation in all languages. I assume the relevant operation to be deletion, following Ross (1969), Lasnik (1999) and Merchant (2001), and present the evidence for the focus licensing of sluicing from Slavic languages like Russian and Polish, where it is possible to have not only wh-phrases but also focused R-expressions as remnants of sluicing. I also demonstrate how the unavailability of SP readings in multiple interrogatives in a given language is found even under sluicing. In addition, this forms a new argument for the full clausal structure of the sluice, as opposed to the structure of the sluice consisting of just the remnant material. Finally, I explore Superiority effects under sluicing in languages that do not show Superiority effects in non-elliptical structures. I derive those effects from an independent property of ellipsis, namely, scope parallelism.

In Chapter 4, I explore the interaction between multiple wh-fronting, left-branch extraction (LBE) and sluicing, with the hope of finding insight into the nature of each of these phenomena. One of the issues I address is why, even though LBE is available in certain multiple wh-fronting languages (e.g. Russian,

Serbo-Croatian), multiple LBE is prohibited in these languages. In order to solve this puzzle, we will take a close look at the processes underlying LBE as compared to regular *wh*-movement. I will argue that LBE, unlike regular *wh*-movement, is head-movement to a Topic head above TP, essentially a scrambling type of move. The account builds on the unified analysis of d-linking and scrambling developed by Boeckx and Grohmann (2004) and draws on the connection between LBE and movement of d-linked *wh*-phrases. The conclusion that will be reached is that prohibition against multiple LBE is a result of a minimality violation (i.e. Minimal Link Condition of Chomsky (1995)).

This analysis provides a ready solution to another puzzle, namely, why multiple LBE violations are not repaired by sluicing, given that sluicing is known to repair certain types of derivations. The answer will come from the fact that sluicing cannot repair minimality violations in principle, and violations of multiple LBE are analyzed as minimality violations.

In addition, I will explore the interaction among LBE, islands and sluicing. I will attempt to explain why LBE out of an island cannot be repaired by sluicing. To understand this phenomenon, I will use a phase account of LBE of Bošković (2005). I argue that our analysis of LBE as head-movement as opposed to phrasal movement provides a crucial distinction for our understanding of why LBE out of an island cannot be remedied by sluicing. As part of the analysis, I develop an account of how locality violations are encoded in the derivation and how the distinction between head and phrasal movement are relevant there. This provides an explanation for why some locality violations are repaired by sluicing and others are not.

In Chapter 5, I report the results of several acquisition studies on how young children acquiring English, Russian, and Malayalam respectively produce and interpret multiple interrogatives. Because the majority of the studies on acquisition of questions focus on single and not multiple interrogatives, my goal here is to make some initial steps in approaching the learnability issues in multiple interrogatives.

First, I explore how much evidence for the syntactic and semantic properties of multiple interrogatives children receive in the linguistic input by conducting a corpus analysis of parental speech in the CHILDES database. The results show a great discrepancy between the frequencies of occurrence of single vs. multiple interrogatives in the parental speech. Multiple interrogatives occur much more rarely than single interrogatives. This suggests that children acquire the language-specific facts about multiple interrogatives at a later age than they do with respect to single interrogatives. I then investigate at what age children exhibit the knowledge of the syntax and semantics of multiple interrogatives by eliciting those structures from children and adults in specific contexts.

The overall conclusion is that, with the limited direct evidence in the input, children are still able to acquire the language-specific facts about multiple interrogatives at quite an early age.

The specific experimental results show that children acquiring Russian, English, and Malayalam exhibit adult-like semantic knowledge of the restriction on the SP readings in these languages by 4;9. I develop a learning algorithm for acquisition of these semantic properties suggesting that children deduce the relevant properties of multiple interrogatives from another property of language: the presence of an independent Focus projection above TP in a given language. The positive evidence that children use in acquiring this property consists of the overt focus morphology in some languages and the distribution of the focus-fronted expressions in other languages.

For the acquisition of syntax of multiple interrogatives, I report that, unlike English- and Malayalam-speaking children, Russian-speaking children produce certain non-adult-like structures where only one *wh*-phrase is fronted in a multiple question, when all *wh*-phrases are fronted in these contexts in adult Russian. To explain this finding, I suggest that acquisition multiple *wh*-fronting involves learning the crucial properties of contrastive focus, which has been argued in the literature to be the underlying trigger for multiple *wh*-fronting. I also discuss how Russian-speaking children acquire the asymmetry between the syntactic behavior of bare vs. complex *wh*-phrases in Russian and identify it as an additional factor contributing to the acquisition of multiple *wh*-fronting.

In Chapter 6, I investigate how monolingual Russian-speaking and English-speaking children acquire the syntax of contrastively focused *R*-expressions in their respective languages. In this study, I elicited structures containing contrastively focused *R*-expressions from Russian-speaking and English-speaking children and examined their syntax. The Russian-acquiring children were found to make errors in these constructions and those errors are similar to the ones I found in the studies on the acquisition of multiple *wh*-fronting presented in Chapter 5. I treat this finding as evidence for the hypothesis developed in Chapter 5, relating the acquisition of the syntax of multiple interrogatives to the acquisition of the syntax of contrastive focus.

The English-speaking children were found not making any errors in their contrastive focus constructions, which is consistent with similar findings of Chapter 5 with regard to the English-speaking children's performance in multiple interrogatives.

Chapter 7 presents concluding remarks and summarizes the overall findings and analyses reported in this monograph.