In-situ wh-hell: The view from Hungarian
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Introduction. Aggressively non-D-linked wh-phrases – or wh-hell phrases for short – are banned from appearing in situ in multiple-wh questions in English (1) (Pesetsky, 1987). However, this ban does not hold cross-linguistically: in Hungarian, wh-hell phrases may appear both ex situ (1a) and in situ (1b).

(1) a. Who the hell loves who? b. *Who loves who the hell?

In this contribution, we argue that the distribution of Hungarian wh-hell and its effect on the interpretation of a question follow from non-D-linkedness. Crucially, non-D-linkedness does not drive overt movement in Hungarian (cf. Huang and Ochi, 2004), and although wh-hell is polarity-sensitive in Hungarian, it is not sensitive to the type of intervention effect proposed by den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002). Our proposal therefore challenges the cross-linguistic applicability of current views on in situ wh-hell.

Data. In Hungarian, multiple-wh questions (MWHs) may be formed by fronting one wh-phrase to Spec,FocP and leaving the other in situ (3a), or by moving one wh to Spec,FocP and another above it (3b) (Surányi, 2002; Surányi, 2006). Both single-pair (SP) and pair-list (PL) readings are available in partial-fronting MWHs (3a). Only PL is available in multiple-fronting MWHs (3b) (Surányi, 2002).

(3) a. Ki who nézett rá kire? [partial-fronting: SP, PL]
wh who looked on who
‘Who looked at who?’

b. Ki mit vett? [multiple-fronting: *SP, PL]
wh what bought
‘Who bought what?’

In partial-fronting MWHs, wh-hell may appear both ex and in situ. In contrast to (3a), only a SP-reading is available when wh-hell is ex situ.

who the hell looked on who
‘Who the hell looked at who?’

b. Ki nézett rá ki a fenére? [in situ: SP, PL]
who looked on who the hell
‘Who looked at who the hell?’

In multiple-fronting MWHs, wh-hell must be the lowest of the two fronted wh-phrases. As in (3b), only a PL-reading is available.

(5) a. Ki mi a fenét vett? [ex situ/low: *SP, PL]
who what the hell bought
‘Who bought what the hell?’

who the hell what bought

Q-particle approach to MWHs. We couch our analysis of Hungarian MWHs within the Q-particle approach of Kotek (2014) (see also Cable 2010; Hagstrom 1998). We assume that Hungarian wh-questions involve a Foc with the features [uQ, uF] (cf. Surányi, 2002; Surányi, 2006). A Q-particle with [iQ] may merge with a wh-DP, projecting a QP. Foc probes for [iQ] and [iF], resulting in the overt movement of a QP to Spec,FocP. If another QP moves overtly, it targets a higher CP-position, as in (6a) (Surányi, 2002; Surányi, 2006). When a wh-phrase stays in situ in overt syntax, we assume it is either not merged with Q (leading to a SP-reading), or it is, but Q does not project (PL-reading) (6b).
At LF, Q adjoins to the clausal spine, takes a \{ ⟨(st, t), ⟨(st, t), t⟩, \ldots \}\}-type argument α, and sets (i) the ordinary semantic value \[[Q(α)]\] to correspond to \[[α]\], and (ii) the focus semantic value \[[Q(α)]^f\] to correspond to \[[[Q(α)]^f]\]. As the ordinary semantic value of wh-phrases is undefined (Beck, 2006), at least one Q is required for the well-formedness of the structure. Due to the semantics of Q, the ordinary semantic value of the question is determined by the focus semantic value of the wh.

Predictions. We now present two (compatible) predictions concerning wh-hell under the Q-particle approach to Hungarian MWHs. First, den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002) propose that wh-hell phrases are negative polarity items (NPIs), and must be licensed by Q in matrix questions. This licensing relationship is sensitive to intervention; no wh-phrase may appear between Q and wh-hell (8). This means that SP-, but not PL-MWHs with in situ wh-hell are predicted to be ungrammatical in Hungarian (8).

(8) *Q ... wh ... wh-hell [licensing-intervention approach predicts: *SP, in situ]

We propose that it is non-D-linkedness that matters for Hungarian wh-hell. Thus, we simply predict wh-hell to be unacceptable whenever it is the D-linked sorting key in a MWH with a PL-reading (9).

(9) *Q ... wh-hell_{self} ... Q ... wh [non-D-linkedness approach predicts: *PL, ex situ/high]

Hungarian MWHs: (8) vs (9). The schematic LFs of the MWHs in (4) and (5) are shown in (10) and (11). In (10a), the presence of a lower Q would lead to a PL-reading where wh-hell is the sorting key; hence, only a SP-reading is available. In (10b), both SP and PL are available. While (8) incorrectly predicts *SP for (10b), (9) correctly predicts it to be fine, as wh-hell is not a sorting key in SP-(10b).

(10) a. Q ... wh-hell_{self} ... (*Q) ... wh [4a]: SP, *PL]
b. Q ... wh_{self} ... (Q) ... wh-hell [4b]: SP, PL]

In multiple-fronting MWHs, which involve two Qs and are never SP, the higher wh is the sorting key, and thus incompatible with hell. The data in (5) therefore also support (9).

(11) a. Q ... wh_{self} ... Q ... wh-hell [5a]: *SP, PL]
b. *Q ... wh-hell_{self} ... Q ... wh [5b]: *SP, *PL]

Conclusion. In English, the ban on in situ wh-hell has been linked to its non-D-linkedness (Pesetsky, 1987) and to an intervention effect (den Dikken and Giannakidou, 2002). Hungarian, a language with overt wh-movement, shows that non-D-linkedness does not necessarily lead to movement, and that the licensing of wh-hell is not sensitive to wh-intervention – just like the licensing of other NPIs is not (12).

(12) Which student read any of these papers? (den Dikken and Giannakidou, 2002, (4b))

Instead, the distribution of Hungarian wh-hell and its effect on the interpretation of a question (SP vs. PL) follows if the aggressively non-D-linked wh-hell can never be the sorting key of a MWH with a PL-reading. Under this approach, the ban on in situ wh-hell in English remains unexplained (see Huang and Ochi, 2004 for a possible explanation). However, the proposal does predict that on the PL-reading of (13), the lower wh-phrase must be the sorting key. Intuitively, this seems to be correct.

(13) I want to know who the hell voted for who.

References