Eliciting focus-sensitive *why*-questions in Japanese

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Abstract

The study argues that in focus-sensitive *why*-questions in Japanese, *why* must precede its focus associate. It is proposed that this word order restriction follows if the *why*-as-CP-modifier approach is applied to the Japanese construction under investigation. It also reports the results of the elicitation experiment conducted to experimentally confirm the word order restriction.

Keywords: focus, Japanese, question elicitation, *why*-question

Introduction

It has been observed that, unlike other *wh*-phrases, reason *wh*-adverbials such as *why* can be focus-sensitive (Bromberger 1992). *Why*-questions are affected by focus shift while other *wh*-questions such as *where*-questions aren't. (Focused items are in small caps.)

(1) a. Why did JOHN buy beer?   -- Because he had his ID.
    b. Why did John buy BEER (not wine)? -- #Because he had his ID.
(2) a. Where did JOHN find the key?   -- In the basket.
    b. Where did John find THE KEY?   -- In the basket.

Kawamura (2007) observes that *because*-clauses in Japanese associate with focus, exhibiting a word order restriction. *Because*-clauses must precede foci.

(3) (*MARY-GA)   [Peter-ga   byoin-ni   yobidasareta   kara]
    M-NOM   P-NOM   hospital-by   called   because
    (MARY-GA)   shiki-ni   ressekishita.
    M-NOM   ceremony-to   attended
    'MARY attended the ceremony because Peter was called by the hospital.'

Now let us observe that this word order restriction on *because*-clauses carries over to their interrogative counterparts. That is, *naze* 'why', *nande* 'why', and *doosite* 'why', when associated with focus, must precede the focused item. (Following the literature, we call it their *focus associate*; see Jackendoff 1972, Rooth 1992, Erlewine 2014.) Although the judgements are somewhat subtle, a

contrast is found between the *why*-questions in (4a) and (4b). No such contrast is found between the *where*-questions in (5a, b).

(4) {a. Naze MAINITI / b. ??MAINITI naze} otokonoko-wa booru-o
     why every day   every day why   boy-TOP   ball-ACC
   kick-Q
   keru-no?
   'Why does the boy kick a ball EVERY DAY?'
(5) {a. Dokode MAINITI / b. MAINITI dokode} otokonoko-wa booru-o
     where every day   every day where   boy-TOP   ball-ACC
   keru-no?
   kick-Q
   'Where does the boy kick a ball EVERY DAY?'

The fact that *why*-focus order is required can be explained in the following manner. In their study of English *why*-stripping (e.g. *John bought beer. -- Why John?*) Yoshida et al. (2015) argue that focus-sensitive *why*-questions like (1a, b) are derived via base-generation of *why* in the matrix higher CP (Rizzi 2001; Ko 2005) and movement of the focus associate to the lower Spec,CP covertly.

(6) [CP1 why C [CP2 _____ C [TP … FOCUS …]]]

We propose that similarly in Japanese, a reason *wh*-phrase is base-generated in the higher CP and the focus movement *must* occur in LF. Then the focus-*why* order in (4b), where the focused item is apparently scrambled over *why*, can be ruled out as a violation of Proper Binding Condition (Fiengo 1977, Saito 1989). The focus associate would have to undergo lowering to the lower Spec,CP in order to get licensed, leaving an unbound trace. (The question of why scrambling of foci cannot be undone is left for future research.)

(7) [CP1 FOCUSi [CP1 why [CP2 _____ [TP … ti …] C] C]]]

As for the fact that (5a, b) do not differ in acceptability, we assume with Rizzi (1997, 2001) that *where* moves to Spec,CP2, which can be taken to mean that *mainiti* 'every day' is not a focused item that the wh-phrase associates with (Yoshida et al. 2015).

One question that arises is, to what extent are the judgements in (4-5) reliable? We believe the contrast in (4) is real but quite subtle and requires rich context. Furthermore, it is not clear at least to us exactly how pronunciation (i.e., prosody) interacts with word order in this construction. These considerations led us to use question elicitation rather than acceptability rating

to test this word order effect. This allows us to control for context and not to deal with prosody as an experimental variable in this preliminary study.

Experiment

We conducted a question elicitation experiment. The goal was to test the hypothesis that *wh* precedes the focus associate more often in reason questions than non-reason questions. Fifteen university students were tested individually. Two experimental conditions were examined in a within-subjects fashion: one condition attempted to prompt participants to ask *why*-questions and the other *where*-questions. In both conditions, the participants were instructed to hear stories, together with a puppet penguin, Pen-chan. Participants were told in advance that Pen-chan might not always pay attention and that they would be requested to ask him a certain question after each story just to see if he was focused. A sample story is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. A sample story, where each scene is accompanied with a picture shown on the computer screen.

Scene 1	Mother promises Ken that she will buy him a new soccer ball if he practices every day. He goes to a nearby playground. But it doesn't have a soccer goal. He wants to have one.
Scene 2	He decides to move to his school's playground, where a goal is available. He can practice a lot there.
Scene 3	He goes there to practice next day, too.
Scene 4	On the following day, too, he does the same. Mother gives him a new soccer ball.

After the story is told, the experimenter gives a prompt (e.g., (8)), and then the participant responds to it (e.g., (9)). Each participant experienced six critical trials and four fillers in a randomized order after two practice trials. Responses were coded into three categories: "wh-focus order," "focus-wh order," and "miscellaneous."

(8) *Experimenter's prompt*
Pen-chan-ni otokonoko-ga mainiti booru-o {a. *keru riyuu-o* / b. *basyo-o*} *kiitemite kudasai.*
'Could you ask Pen-chan the {a. reason why / b. place where} the boy kicks a ball every day?'

(9) *Sample wh-focus response to the Reason prompt*
Nee Pen-chan, otokonoko-wa nande mainiti   booru-o keru-no?
hey Pen-chan boy-TOP   why   every day ball-ACC kick-Q
'Hello, Pen-chan. Why does the boy kick a ball every day?'

Results

The participants gave *wh*-focus responses 71.1 % of the time to Reason prompts (32/45) and 22.2% of the time to Place prompts (10/45). A one-way ANOVA revealed that the difference between the two conditions was highly significant (F(1,14) = 19.05, p = 0.0006). It showed that the participants know that *why*-questions are different from non-*why* questions in the way described by the theoretical analysis.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we conducted an elicitation experiment to demonstrate a word order restriction on focus-sensitive *why*-questions in Japanese. The results revealed that the phenomenon exists and requires an explanation. The analysis we have proposed here constitutes one.

Acknowledgements

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