

The Clausal Typing Hypothesis and Optional Wh-Movement in Malagasy

Eric Potsdam
University of Florida

The Clausal Typing Hypothesis (CTH) (Cheng 1997) proposes that languages must syntactically mark (or “type”) a wh-question and that they do so with either wh-movement or a question particle (which may be phonologically null). Cheng 1997 proposes that an Economy-driven corollary of the CTH is that no language makes use of both strategies: a language uses either wh-movement and no question particle or a question particle and no wh-movement (i.e. wh-in-situ). In other words, there are no optional wh-movement languages.

Malagasy, a predicate-initial Austronesian language spoken in Madagascar, seems to be a counterexample to this claim in allowing both wh-in-situ and wh-fronting:

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| <p>(1) a. <i>wh-in-situ</i>
 nividy vary taiza Rasoa?
 buy rice where Rasoa
 ‘Where did Rasoa buy rice?’</p> | <p>b. <i>wh-fronting</i>
 taiza no nividy vary Rasoa?
 where buy rice Rasoa</p> |
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This paper argues (contra Sabel 2003) that the apparent wh-fronting construction is not derived by wh-movement but has a NON-MOVEMENT PSEUDOCLEFT ANALYSIS, schematized in (2). The wh-phrase is a clause-initial predicate and the remaining material is a headless relative clause in subject position. The paper concludes that Malagasy is thus not a counterexample to the CTH.

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| <p>(2) a. iza no nihomehy?
 who laugh
 ‘Who laughed?’</p> | <p>b. [_{IP} [_{PredP/predicate} iza] [_{DP/rel. clause} no nihomehy]]
 who laugh
 (lit. ‘The one who laughed is who?’)</p> |
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Evidence for the pseudocleft analysis comes from a number of domains. First, Cheng 1997 claims that there is a further correlation between wh-in-situ and yes-no question particles: all and only wh-in-situ languages have special markings in yes-no questions (Cheng 1997:16). Malagasy is in keeping with this generalization in having a yes-no question particle:

- (3) nihomehy **ve** Rabe?
laugh **Q** Rabe
‘Did Rabe laugh?’

Second, the cleft analysis makes the structure of wh-questions parallel to that of the superficially similar focus construction, (4), which Paul 2001 argues is also a pseudocleft.

- (4) Rabe no nihomehy
Rabe laugh
‘It’s Rabe who laughed’

Both are formed by preposing a constituent and following it immediately with the invariant particle *no*, both constructions place a focus interpretation on the initial XP, and both constructions are subject to the same restriction that the initial constituent can only correspond to a subject or an adjunct (Keenan 1976 and others). Under the wh-movement analysis, the two constructions would have very different structures and the parallels between them would be accidental, requiring different explanations in each case.

Third, Malagasy has a number of particles that occur immediately before or after the predicate (Keenan 1976) in ordinary clauses. The cleft analysis correctly predicts that the wh-phrase in a wh-question will behave like a predicate with respect to the positioning of such particles. Post-predicate particles (floating quantifiers, the exclamative particle *anie*, and VP adverbs) can immediately follow the wh-phrase, (5a), and pre-predicate particles (modality and emphasis particles) can precede the wh-phrase,

(5b). Under the wh-movement analysis, such data require exceptional placement rules for these particles in wh-questions because they do not otherwise associate with fronted constituents or wh-phrases.

- (5) a. **iza** **anie** no manapaka bozaka?
 who **EXCL** cut grass
 ‘Who is really cutting the grass?’
 b. **tokony** iza no hamangy an-dRakoto?
 should who visit ACC-Rakoto
 ‘Who should visit Rakoto?’

Fourth, the cleft analysis provides a superior treatment of discontinuous wh-phrases:

- (6) a. **iza** **tamin’** **ireo** **boky** **ireo** no novakian-dRabe?
 which **PREP** **these** **book** **these** read.PASSIVE-Rabe
 b. **iza** no novakian-dRabe **tamin’** **ireo** **boky** **ireo**?
 which read.PASSIVE-Rabe **PREP** **these** **book** **these**
 ‘Which of these books were read by Rabe?’

Under the cleft analysis, such examples involve rightward PP extraposition from the predicate, which places the PP after the subject. This operation is found independently in Malagasy:

- (7) a. **fahatelo** **tamin’** **ireo** **mpianatra** **ireo** Rabe
 third **PREP** **these** **student** **these** Rabe
 b. **fahatelo** Rabe **tamin’** **ireo** **mpianatra** **ireo**
 third Rabe **PREP** **these** **student** **these**
 ‘Rabe was third among these students’

Under the wh-movement analysis, the structure of discontinuous wh-phrases must involve subextraction of the wh-determiner from the subject. The paper shows that this is not a derivation that the language otherwise permits.

Finally, the pseudocleft analysis receives support from a northern Madagascar dialect. The Antakarana dialect (Hanitrimalala 2000) shows widespread use of SVO word order, and other French-like innovations, which are not possible in Standard Malagasy. The paper demonstrates that it nevertheless still uses a pseudocleft structure for its questions.

In summary, the paper argues that Malagasy is a pure wh-in-situ language. Apparent wh-fronting examples are pseudoclefts in which the initial wh-phrase is a predicate. As a consequence, the Clausal Typing Hypothesis as a cross-linguistic generalization can be maintained, at least in this case. The paper concludes with a more general discussion of the CTH and its place in syntactic theory.

References

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