Focus Intervention Effects in Questions  
Shin-Sook Kim (University of Frankfurt)

Introduction  Beck (1996) and Beck & Kim (1997) discuss the interaction between *wh*-in-situ elements and quantifiers, and propose that an intervening quantifier blocks LF movement of *wh*-in-situ to an operator position. This “intervention effect” is further discussed by Pesetsky (2000) with reference to LF feature movement. *Wh*-intervention effects exist in a wide variety of languages (see e.g. Hoji 1985 for Japanese, Kim 2002 for Malayalam, Beck 1996 for Hindi/Urdu and Turkish). Despite its apparent universal character, the intervention effect shows some crosslinguistic variation. It is not even the case that all quantifiers induce an intervention effect for *wh*-in-situ in Korean. For example, quantifiers like *most N or always/often* do not induce intervention effects in Korean.

Focus Intervention Effects  Considering the crosslinguistic variation regarding harmful interveners for *wh*-licensing, Kim (2002) proposes that the crosslinguistically stable core set of interveners consists of focus phrases (see the Korean examples (1)–(2) and the Mandarin Chinese examples (3)–(4)). Note that focus phrases induce an intervention effect even for nominal *wh*-phrases in Mandarin Chinese, which otherwise do not show the effect when c-commanded by a quantifier or negation (cf. Soh 2005).

(1)  a. ?*Mira-man mwukwu-lul chotayha-ess-ni?  
   Mira-only who-ACC invite-PAST-Q  
   ‘Who did only Mira invite?’

   b. *Nwukwu-lul Mira-man t chotayha-ess-ni?  
      who-ACC Mira-only invite-PAST-Q  
      ‘Who did only Mira invite?’

(2)  a. *MIRA-ka mwukwu-lul chotayha-ess-ni?  
     Mira-NOM who-ACC invite-PAST-Q  
     ‘Who did MIRA invite?’

   b. Nwukwu-lul MIRA-ka t chotayha-ess-ni?  
      who-ACC Mira-NOM invite-PAST-Q  
      ‘Who did MIRA invite?’

(3)  a. ?*Lian Lili ye kan de dong na-ben shu?  
      even Lili also read DE understand which-CL book

   b. Na-ben shu lian Lili ye kan de dong?  
      which-CL book even Lili also read DE understand  
      ‘Which book could even Lili understand?’

(4)  a. ?*Zhiyou Lili kan-le na-ben shu?  
     only Lili read-ASP which-CL book

   b. Na-ben shu zhiyou Lili kan-le?  
      which-CL book only Lili read-ASP  
      ‘Which book did only Lili read?’

Based on crosslinguistic data, Kim (2002) proposes the following generalization on *wh*-licensing:

(5)  A focus phrase may not intervene between a *wh*-phrase and its licensing interrogative complementizer.

We can assume that an intervention effect occurs whenever a focus sensitive operator intervenes between the interrogative C and the *wh*-phrase in situ. I also propose that *wh*-in-situ phrases do not undergo any LF movement (featural or phrasal). The standard assumption that the *wh*-phrase raises for semantic reasons at LF has always faced the problem that covert movement of *wh*-in-situ does not show the island effects observed for overt *wh*-movement. In the minimalist framework (Chomsky
2000, 2001 and most recently, Chomsky 2005) it is assumed that overt \textit{wh}-movement is not triggered by the need to check some feature, but is merely driven by EPP (or \textit{edge-feature}), a purely syntactic requirement on configuration which does not involve any feature matching. Feature checking is done by Agree at a distance, so there is no reason for \textit{wh}-in-situ phrases to undergo any LF movement. In recent work, Beck (2004) proposes an in-situ interpretation mechanism for \textit{wh}-phrases in terms of the alternative semantics for questions (following Hamblin 1973 and Rooth 1992). Given this, there is no syntactic or semantic reason to assume that \textit{wh}-in-situ phrases undergo any movement at LF.

**Focus and WH** Now the question is why focus should induce an intervention effect for \textit{wh}-in-situ. It is well-known that focused elements and \textit{wh}-elements share some similarities in terms of their overt syntax, semantics and phonology in a number of languages. Some languages require \textit{wh}-phrases to appear in the designated structural position for focus (e.g., Hungarian and Malayalam). \textit{Wh}-movement in these languages is argued to be an instance of focus movement: \textit{wh}-phrases bear a focus feature that makes them target the same position as other focused constituents. Phonologically, a \textit{wh}-element carries a pitch accent which is characteristic of focused elements.

For the semantics of focus elements and \textit{wh}-elements, Beck (2004) proposes that \textit{wh}-phrases and focus make use of the same interpretational mechanism, and therefore focus may interfere with a \textit{wh}-in-situ. She suggests that \textit{wh}-phrases and focused phrases both introduce alternatives into the computation. However, unlike focus, \textit{wh}-phrases do not have any ordinary semantic value. It is the function of the question operator Q to lift the focus semantic value of the \textit{wh}-phrase to the level of ordinary semantics. This process can be understood as to be parallel to the traditional syntactic \textit{wh}-licensing by the abstract Q-morpheme (Baker 1970). Beck argues that intervention effects follow from focus interpretation. More specifically, an intervention effect occurs whenever a focus sensitive operator other than the question operator tries to evaluate a constituent containing a \textit{wh}-phrase – the resulting LF fails to have an ordinary semantic interpretation.

Syntactically, the effect can be analyzed as a case of intervention effect induced by the intervening focus operator which has the interpretable focus feature F (\textit{iF}, following Pesetsky & Torrego’s 2004 notation). I assume that the interrogative C has both an interpretable Q feature (\textit{iQ}) and an interpretable F feature (\textit{iF}), and that a \textit{wh}-phrase has uninterpretable Q and F features (\textit{uQ}, \textit{uF}). Now the \textit{wh}-phrase has to be licensed by the interrogative C by the operation Agree, but the intervening Focus with the interpretable F feature blocks the Agree relation between the two, as illustrated in (6).

(6) \[ *[\text{CP } C_{[iQ,iF]}[\ldots \text{Foc}_{[iF]}[\ldots \text{wh}_{[uQ,uF]}[\ldots]]] \]

**Further Evidence for Focus Intervention** Another construction sensitive to focus intervention is the alternative question. A well-formed example is given in (7-a); the question is to be interpreted as a choice between the answers (John drank) Tea and (John drank) Coffee. Note that (7-b), where a focus phrase precedes the disjunctive phrase, is unacceptable. Similar effects can be found in Korean (see (8)) and German. It is clear that alternative questions involve a set of alternatives semantically, just like \textit{wh}-questions. Following von Stechow (1991), I will assume that the disjunctive phrase in alternative questions introduces a set of alternatives (here, the set \{tea, coffee\}), which are evaluated by the question operator; as before, an intervening focus operator blocks the evaluation of the alternatives.

(7) a. Did John drink COFFee or TEA? \[ [\sqrt{\text{AltQ}}] \]
b. ??Did only John drink COFFee or TEA? \[ [*\text{AltQ}] \]

(8) a. ?*Mira-man cha-lul masi-ess-ni animyen khephi-lul masi-ess-ni? \[ [*\text{AltQ}] \]
Mira-only tea-ACC drink-PAST-Q if not coffee-ACC drink-PAST-Q
‘Did only Mira drink tea or coffee?’
b. *MIRA-ka cha-lul masi-ess-ni animyen khephi-lul masi-ess-ni? \[ [*\text{AltQ}] \]
Mira-NOM tea-ACC drink-PAST-Q if not coffee-ACC drink-PAST-Q
‘Did MIRA drink tea or coffee?’