

On “optional” wh-/focus fronting in Igbo: A SYN-SEM-PHON interaction

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We present new data from Igbo (Benue-Kwa, Nigeria) in which wh- and focus fronting seem to be optional. We argue that the optionality is not syntactic but arises at PF. Syntactically, exactly one wh-/focused phrase must move to the left periphery (SpecFocP). What is optional is where the moved constituent is pronounced: in its base position (leading to wh-/focus in-situ) or in its landing site (resulting in wh-/focus ex-situ). We show that the optionality in pronunciation of the displaced wh-/focus constituent is influenced by semantic/pragmatic factors. Thus, pronunciation at PF is influenced by LF, which suggests that these two modules can interact somehow.

For some languages it has been argued that wh-in-situ is only a surface PF effect (see e.g. Bayer & Cheng 2017). We show that Igbo provides evidence for this view based on the observation that sentences with in-situ elements exhibit the hallmarks of (A'-)movement just like ex-situ elements: (i) in-situ wh-/focus elements cannot occur inside islands, (ii) they license parasitic gaps (*pgs*) – and we know that *pgs* can only be licensed by syntactic but not by LF movement (cf. Engdahl 1983), and (iii) they do not induce Beck intervention effects when c-commanded by negation or a foc-sensitive particle (cf. Beck 1996, 2006). Thus, we conclude that in apparent in-situ cases the wh-/foc-constituent undergoes syntactic movement to SpecFoc just like in ex-situ cases, but the lowest copy is pronounced at PF.

We identified semantic/pragmatic factors that influence the choice: Ex-situ focus is preferably used for expressing contrast or corrections, while in-situ focus is used to express new information (cf. e.g. Fiedler et al. 2010). As for questions, sentences with in-situ wh-elements can receive an echo or a matrix question interpretation, while wh-ex-situ can only have a matrix question interpretation. It is semantic/pragmatic factors rather than syntactic factors that govern the spell-out of the lowest or the highest copy in a movement chain at PF. This is unexpected under the classic T/Y-model of grammar (Chomsky 1981 et seq.) where spell-out and interpretation are strictly separated. Instead, they need to interact e.g. as suggested in Bobaljik's (2002) Single Output Syntax, which we adopt for Igbo.

References: • Bayer, J. & L. Cheng. 2017. Wh-in-situ. *Blackwell Companion to Syntax* 2. • Beck, S. 1996. Quantified structures as barriers for LF movement. *NLS* 4. 1–56. • Bobaljik, J. 2002. A-chains at the PF-interface: Copies and 'covert' movement. *NLLT* 20. 197–267. • Engdahl, E. 1983. Parasitic gaps. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 6. 5–34. • Fiedler, I. et al. 2010. Subject focus in West African languages. In M. Zimmermann & C. Féry (eds.), *Information structure from different perspectives*, 234–257. Oxford: OUP.