

TOPICS IN QUESTIONS

Beste Kamali, Daniel Büring

In this talk we present evidence that contrastive topic (CT) is marked in questions. Our main data comes from Turkish. Apart from novel data on the realization of topics, the talk has direct bearing on the theory of topic interpretation, as it shows that CT can be marked in questions as well as in declaratives (pace Büring, 2003).

Data: The question marker *mI* usually attaches after the constituent bearing sentential stress, e.g. the object in a broadly focused transitive sentence, (1a), or a narrowly focused constituent, (1b/c) (main stress=capitals; *mI* marked in bold):

- (1) a. Ali dün İSKAMBİL **mI** oynadı?
Ali yesterday cards Q played
'Did Ali play cards yesterday?'
b. Ali DÜN **mü** iskambil oynadı.
'Was it yesterday that Ali played cards?'
c. ALİ **mI** dün iskambil oynadı?
'Was it Ali who played cards yesterday?'

When *mI* is placed in final position, but main stress, and the same pitch contour as in the previous examples occur earlier in the sentence, a different interpretation results:

- (2) Ali hiç İSKAMBİL oynar **mI**?
Ali ever cards plays Q
'Does Ali ever play CARDS?' 'Is cards one of the things Ali plays?'
(3) a. ALİ iskambil oynar **mI**?
'Does ALİ play cards?' 'Is Ali one of the people who play cards?'
b. Ali DÜN iskambil oynadı **mI**?
'Did Ali play cards YESTERDAY?' 'Was yesterday one of those days Ali played cards?'

As the paraphrases are meant to suggest, these questions are understood as decidedly non-exhaustive. Thus, (3a)/(3b) directly contrast with (1b)/(1c) above, which express an expectation that in case of a 'yes' answer, Ali exhaustively identifies the card players (among the relevant individuals), and yesterday the exclusive time of playing, respectively. (3a)/(3b), on the other hand, express the expectation that even if Ali played cards (yesterday), others might have, too (and perhaps on other days). Call these EXHAUSTIVE

and NON-EXHAUSTIVE questions, respectively.

Subject CT is not found in the same example as the adverb. I rephrase below: (3a), on the other hand, expresses the expectation that in the case of a ‘yes’ answer Ali is part of the set of card players whose existence is presupposed. Similarly, (3b) involves the presupposition that Ali played cards on the days before, and asks if yesterday is part of the presupposed set.

If a context/question is biased in favor of either reading, one of the question-types becomes unacceptable. When the context requires that the accented element denotes an exhaustive set, final attachment of the clitic is out:

- (4) a. Bu Kupa’da en çok gol-ü MESSI **mi** attı?
cup-loc most many goal-acc Messi Q scored
 ‘Did Messi score the most goals in this World Cup?’
 b. #Bu Kupa’da en çok golü MESSI attı**mi**?

Conversely, when the accented element is a member of a non-exhaustive set under question, object attachment is unacceptable.

- (5) [77 goals have been scored so far in World Cup 2010.]
 a. KLOSE gol attı **mi**?
Klose goal scored Q
 ‘Did KLOSE score a goal?’
 b. #Klose **mi** gol attı?

Analysis: We propose that post-verbal *mi*-marking is indicative of a contrastive topic, rather than a focus, in the question. More specifically, the main stress constituent is CT, while the finite verb bears polarity focus (*mi* thus consistently attaches to the focus in both cases).

As proposed in Büring (2003), CT marks a *strategy*: different sub-questions of the same type serve to jointly answer a super-question. Crucially, a direct, exhaustive answer to the superquestion is not part of a strategy (cf. the discussion of CT-marking in questions containing universals and polarity focus in that paper). We extend this to claiming that a subquestion that asks for an exhaustive (rather than a partial) answer likewise is not part of a strategy, and hence forbids CT marking. Where, on the other hand, several subquestions jointly seek to answer the superquestion, a strategy exists, and CT marking is thus preferred (op. cit.).

Significance: English and German appear to utilize only focus-type marking in questions. Indeed, the topic theory in Büring (2003) *predicts* that focusing in questions should have an effect parallel to CT-marking in answers. Our findings indicate that this is at least not universally so. Turkish questions clearly differentiate CT- and F-marking. An adaption of Büring’s theory allows us to pragmatically characterize the two uses parallel to those in declaratives.

References

Büring, Daniel. 2003. On D-Trees, Beans, and B-Accents. *Linguistics & Philosophy* 26:511–545.