Focus in interrogatives
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Descriptively, this talk is about the prosody of wh-words: (a) Why do wh-words show focus prosody (attract sentence stress) in Japanese? (b) Why do wh-words attract sentence stress in English and German echo-questions like 'You saw who at the party?'? I argue that this is not because of givenness of the other constituents, and instead forms a natural class of grammatically conditioned sentence-stress-attraction with Japanese: With no wh-movement to Spec,CP, a wh-word in situ attracts sentence stress. (c) Further, a wh-word in situ in a multiple wh-question like 'I know [who brought what (to the party)]' attracts obligatory accent (here on 'what'), even though a single wh-pronoun in a wh-question does not ('what' in 'I know [what he brought to the party]'). Of course, the moved wh-word in the latter case also does not attract sentence stress, in difference to the Japanese and to the English/German echo-question cases.

The issue connects to a range of syntactic cases in other languages, in which wh-phrases and focused phrases move to the same syntactic position, or are marked by the same morpheme. The similarity to the stress-cases above is that unmoved wh-phrases show stress-patterns as though they were inherently focused. The larger question at issue here is where such parallels between wh-phrases and focused phrases come from.

I develop a more conservative and a more surprising version of my suggestion. I outline only the latter here.

In the semantic part of the talk, I advance an account in which the feature [F] that marks a focused constituent in focus constructions is in fact the same feature as the feature [wh] that marks the wh-word in an interrogative. When it is associated with a focus-scope-marker DF (or ∼), it serves to mark information structure focus. When it is associated with an interrogative Q-marker, it serves to mark the wh-word as [wh]. Formally, however, the two uses of [F] contribute the same meaning. (The scope markers DF/∼ and Q remain distinct entities, to be sure.)

Prosodically, the feature [F], which also does duty as [wh], attracts stress/accent in both its uses. This will account for stress-attraction in Japanese question words and in English and German echo-questions, as well as on the wh-word in situ in multiple questions. The systematic 'exception' from this perspective is then a wh-phrase that has moved to Spec,CP and is checked against Q, which fails to show focus prosody. I discuss to what extent this can be seen as a consequence of 'checking off' the feature [F] in overt syntax after wh-movement, before it can trigger its stress-attracting effect at PF.