

The closeness constraint on focus association and the syntax of Q-particles

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Introduction

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But in some languages, focus particles must be **as close to their associates as possible** (Erlewine 2017 for Vietnamese; Zanon 2018 for Russian a.o.).

E.g. Russian *tol'ko* 'only' requires adjacency with its associate:

- (2) a. *Andrej tol'ko [PIROG]_F ispek dlja sestry.*
Andrej only pie baked for sister
- b. **Andrej tol'ko ispek [PIROG]_F dlja sestry.*
Andrej only baked pie for sister
- c. **Tol'ko Andrej ispek [PIROG]_F dlja sestry.*
only Andrej baked pie for sister
'Andrej only baked [A PIE]_F for his sister.' (based on Zanon 2018: 420)

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Anna Ceylon serves fresh tea

'Anna serves fresh [CEYLON]_F tea.'

(Zanon 2018: 434)

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'Anna serves fresh [CEYLON]_F tea.'

(Zanon 2018: 434)

(4) a. **Anna podaet [svežij tol'ko TSEJLONSKIJ_F čaj].*

Anna serves fresh only Ceylon tea

b. ?*Anna podaet tol'ko [svežij TSEJLONSKIJ_F čaj].*

Anna serves only fresh Ceylon tea

c. **Tol'ko Anna podaet [svežij TSEJLONSKIJ_F čaj].*

only Anna serves fresh Ceylon tea

'Anna serves only fresh [CEYLON]_F tea.' (based on Zanon 2018: 434)

The closeness constraint is attested also in *wh*-questions, with the Q-particle *də* in Sinhala:

- (5) *Chitra kohe də giyee?*
Chitra where də go.pst.foc
'Where did Chitra go?'

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Roadmap:

- Establishing the closeness constraint in Sinhala *wh*-questions
- Challenging the previous accounts of Sinhala *wh*-questions
- Proposing a phase-based movement account of *də*

Closeness constraint in Sinhala *wh*-questions

Basic paradigm

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- (7) *Chitra kohe də* {giyee / *giyaa}?
Chitra where də go.pst.foc go.pst.nfoc
'Where did Chitra go?'
- (8) *kau də potə kieuwe?*
who də book read.foc
'Who read the book?'
- (9) *kohomə də kaa-ekə hadanne?*
how də car fix.foc
'How will you fix the car?'

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When the *wh*-word is in an island, *də* requires **adjacency with the island**:

- (10) a. **[monəwa də gattə kenaa] aawe?*
what q buy.pst.inf person come.pst.foc
- b. *[monəwa gattə kenaa] də aawe?*
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lit. 'What did a person [that bought t] came?'

In long-distance questions, *də* requires **adjacency with the embedded CP**:

- (11) a. **[Ranjit monəwa də gatta kiyəla] kiuwe?*
Ranjit what q buy.pst.nfoc c say.pst.foc
- b. *[Ranjit monəwa gatta kiyəla] də kiuwe?*
Ranjit what buy.pst.nfoc c q say.pst.foc
lit. 'What did you say [that Ranjit bought t]?'

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Competition between different positions of *də* in degree questions

When *kochchərə* 'how much' is in an island, *də* requires **adjacency with the island!**

- (15) a. *[siŋhələ kochchərə dannə laməj-ek] də aawe?*
Sinhala how.much know.npst.inf child-indef q come.pst.foc
- b. **[siŋhələ kochchərə dannə laməj-ek] aawa də?*
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- (16) a. *Ranjit [John siɣhələ kochchərə dannəwa kijəla] də kiuwe?*
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'How much did Ranjit say [John knows Sinhala t]?'

Closeness constraint: Sinhala *də* is restricted to positions that are as close to the *wh*-word as possible.

Previous accounts

Hagstrom (1998); Kishimoto (2005); Morita (2019)

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Sentence-final *də* is derived by

- overt movement to C (Hagstrom 1998; Kishimoto 2005), or
- base-generation at a sentence-final position (Morita 2019)

Problem

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- (18) *siŋhələ kochchərə dannəwa də?*
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b. **[siŋhələ kochchərə dannə laməj-ek] aawa də?*

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Under the existing accounts, it's not clear how the operation that derives (19a) (i.e. covert movement) blocks the operation that derives (19b) (i.e. overt movement or base-generation).

A phase-based movement analysis of Sinhala *wh*-questions

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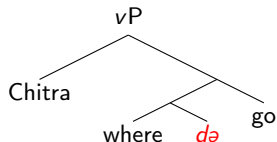
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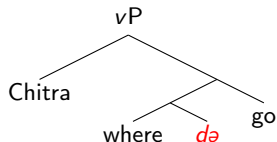


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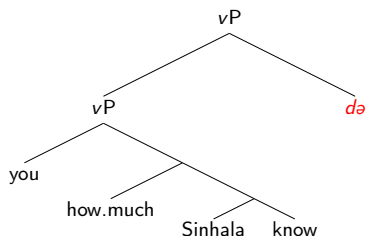
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Degree questions:



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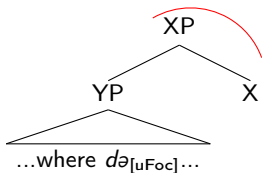
Upon the completion of each phase, [uFoc] forces $d\theta$ to move to the phasal edge to be accessible to a potential feature-checker (Bošković 2007's formulation of Last Resort).

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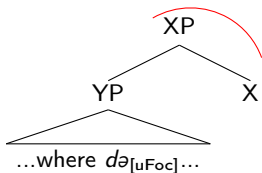


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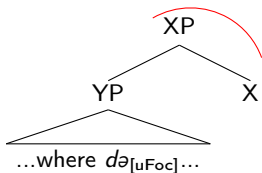
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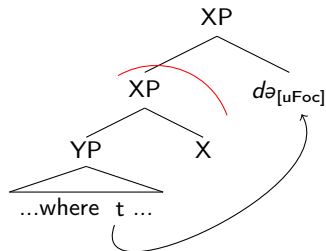
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✓ Move to be accessible to a potential feature-checker!

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E.g. Movement from CP and NP phases

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(20) Embedded CPs

[_{CP} Ranjit [_{monəwa} t] gatta kiyəla] də kiuwe?
Ranjit what buy.pst.nfoc c q say.pst.foc
lit. 'What did you say [that Ranjit bought t]?'

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(21) NP islands

$[_{NP}$ $[_{monəwa}$ *t*] *gattə* *kenaa*] *də* *aawe*?
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[_{NP} [_{monəwa} t] gattə kənaa] də aawe?
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lit. 'What did a person [that bought t] came?'

But *vP* is also a phase. Why does *də* never show up next to *vP*? (though cf. Keine and Zeijlstra 2021 for the view that *vP* is not a phase)

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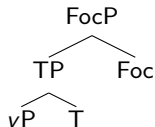
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Ingredient 3: Contextual phasehood (Bošković 2014)

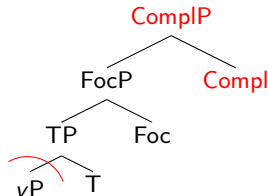
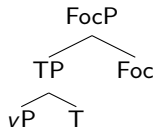
A phase is the highest phrase in an extended projection. Its phasal status is 'activated' only when a higher phasal head is merged into the structure (cf. Chomsky 2001).

So, vP gets activated as a phase only when the highest phrase in the next extended projection is merged. Which phrase is it?

Sinhala has a split CP (Kishimoto 2005, 2018):

- (22) a. *Ranjit [Chitra aawa dənæddə kijəla] æhuwa.*
Ranjit Chitra came.nfoc whether that asked.nfoc
'Ranjit asked whether Chitra came.' (Kishimoto 2018)
- b. [*CompIP [ForceP [FocP [...] Foc] dənæddə] kijəla]*

Consequence: **The phasehood of vP is activated only when **CompI** is merged!**

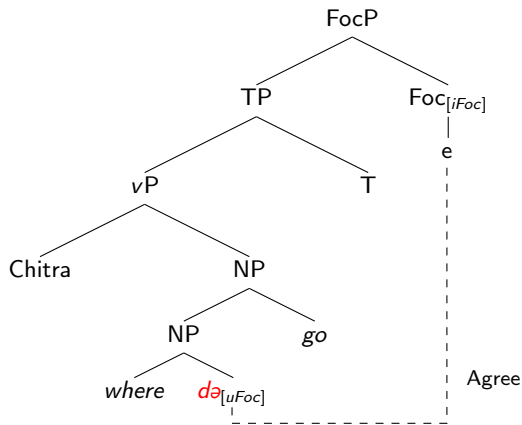


Deriving simple non-degree questions

- (23) *Chitra kohe də giyee?*
Chitra where q went.foc
'Where did Chitra go?'

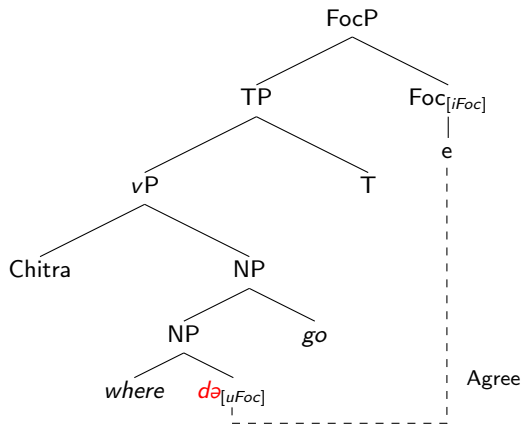
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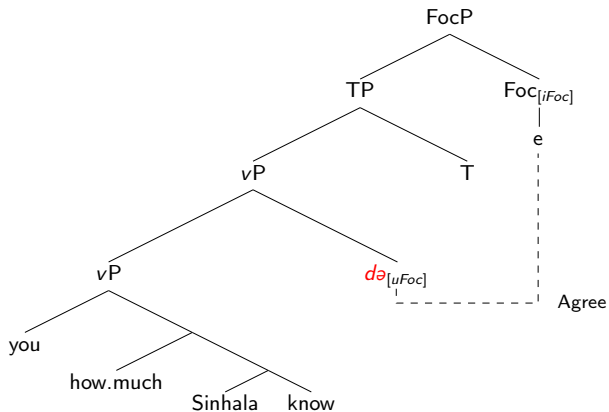
vP is not a phase when Foc is merged. So, Agree is possible.

Deriving simple degree questions

- (24) *siṅhələ kochchərə dannəwa də?*
Sinhala how.much know.nfoc də
'How much Sinhala do you know?'

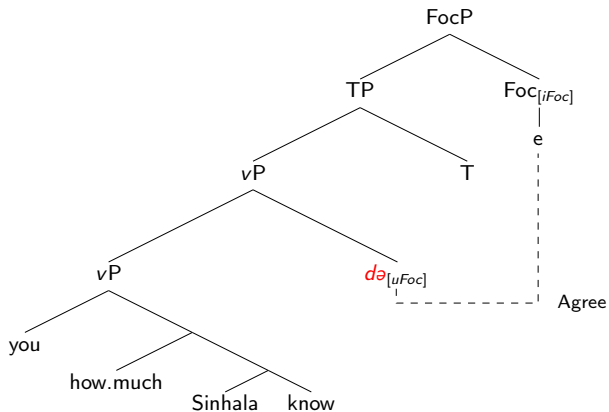
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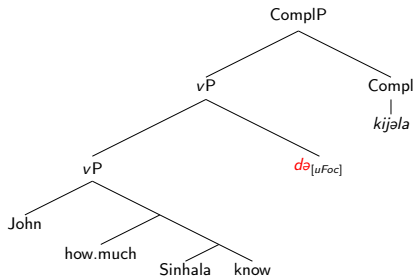
Suffixation of the focus morphology is interrupted by *də*. So, the non-focus morphology gets realized as the default option.

Deriving long-distance degree questions

- (25) *Ranjit [John siŋhələ kochchərə dannəwa kijəla] də kiuwe?*
Ranjit John Sinhala how.much know.npst.fin c q say.pst.foc
'How much did Ranjit say [John knows Sinhala t]?'

Deriving long-distance degree questions

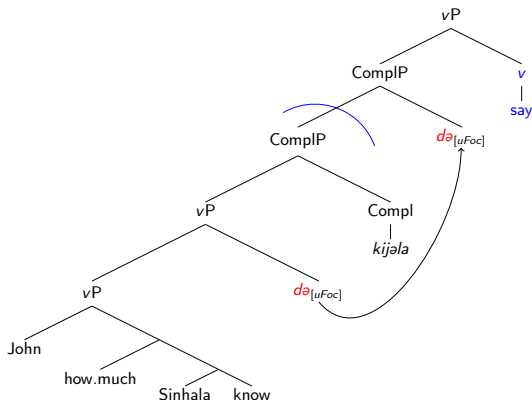
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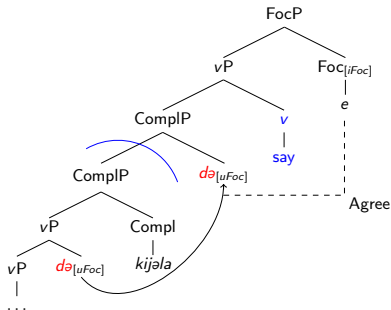
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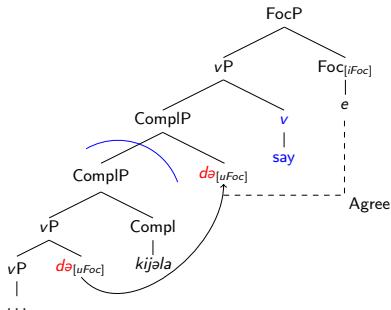
- Matrix *v* activates the phasal status of ComplP.
- When Foc is merged, matrix *vP* isn't a phase. So, Agree is possible.



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- Matrix *v* activates the phasal status of ComplP.
- When Foc is merged, matrix *v*P isn't a phase. So, Agree is possible.



After Agree with Foc, *də* has no motivation to move further. So, the sentence-final *də* is impossible.

Conclusion

Sinhala Q-particle *də* is subject to the constraint that **it be as close to the *wh*-word as possible.**

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- Key observation comes from **degree questions**, where a non-sentence-final position of *də* (adjacent to NP-islands, embedded CPs) blocks *də* from appearing sentence-finally.
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- Key observation comes from **degree questions**, where a non-sentence-final position of *də* (adjacent to NP-islands, embedded CPs) blocks *də* from appearing sentence-finally.
- The competition between different positions of *də* follows from a phase-based derivation of *wh*-questions, where the feature of *də* is checked as soon as it can be.
- Since Sinhala *wh*-questions are also focus constructions, the finding supports the argument that (some) **focus particles** are subject to the closeness constraint (Erlewine 2017).

Thank you!

Many thanks to Dilshara Jayasuriya for patiently sharing her intuitions with me. For discussions and comments, I am indebted to Željko Bošković, Adrian Stegovec, Magdalena Kaufmann, Teruyuki Mizuno, Hadas Kotek, Pasha Koval, Jason Merchant, Yoshiki Fujiwara, and the audiences at USC Syntax+ (February 2021) and UConn LingLunch (March 2021). All errors are mine.

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