

A comparative study of German and Chinese alternative questions

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Aim: to argue that (nominal) alternative questions (AltQ) are *wh*-questions (*wh*-Q) without actually being one.

German AltQ

Chinese AltQ

The intonation matters.

- (1)a. Magst du Brot^{L+H} oder Pommes^{L+H-L%}? **AltQ reading**
want you bread or chips
{that you want bread, that you want chips}
b. Magst du Brot oder Pommes^{L+H-H%}? **Yes/No question (Y/NQ) reading**
{that you want bread or chips, that you don't want bread or chips}

The disjunctor matters.

- (2) a. ni he kele *haishi* xuebi? **AltQ reading**
you drink Cola haishi Sprite
{that you drink Cola, that you drink Sprite}
b. ni he kele *huozhe* xuebi *ma*? **Y/NQ reading**
you drink Cola huozhe Sprite Q-particle
{that you drink Cola or Sprite, that you don't drink Cola or Sprite}

Parallels between *wh*-Qs and AltQs

① Intervention effects in *wh*-Qs and AltQs

*[Q_i [... [FocOp [... *wh*-phrase_i / [A or B]_i...]]]]

Focused elements have both a focus and an ordinary semantic value

Wh-phrases have a focus semantic value and an undefined ordinary value (Beck, 2006; Beck & Kim, 2006)

~ **Op(erator):** unselectively resets the focus semantic value to an ordinary one in German and Chinese

Q Op: selectively lifts the focus semantic value introduced by the *wh*-phrases or disjunctive phrases with which it's coindexed to an ordinary one in German
unselectively lifts all the focus semantic value introduced by the *wh*-phrases or disjunctive phrases in its scope to an ordinary one in Chinese

German

- (3) a. ?* Wann hat nur Maria wen eingeladen?
when has only Maria whom invited
Literal: When did only Maria invite whom?
b. ?* Hat nur Maria den Jonas oder die Ida eingeladen?
has only Maria the Jonas or the Ida invited
Intended: Which of Jonas and Ida has only Maria invited?
(Beck & Kim, 2006)

Q Op is not an intervenor (wide scope reading possible).

- (4) Fragt sich deine Schwester, was {Allergien oder Erkältungen} auslösen kann?
ask herself your sister what {allergy or cold} cause can
{that you sister wonders what can cause allergy,
that you sister wonders what can cause cold}
(5) Wer fragt sich, was welche Krankheit auslösen kann?
who ask himself what which disease cause can
{Eddy wonders what can cause allergy, Anna wonders what can cause a flu, John wonders what can cause headache, ...}

Chinese

- (6) a. *zhiyou Zhangsan he shenme?
only Zhangsan drink what
Intended: What does only Zhangsan drink?
b. *zhiyou Zhangsan he kele *haishi* xuebi?
only Zhangsan drink Cola haishi Sprite?
Intended: Which of Cola and Sprite does only Zhangsan drink?

Q Op is an intervenor (wide scope reading impossible).

- (7) Zhangsan xiang zhidao Lisi mai le {Huawei *haishi* iPhone / nage}?
Zhangsan want know Lisi buy ASP. Huawei haishi iPhone / which-one
{that Zhangsan wonders whether Lisi bought Huawei or iPhone/which one Lisi bought,
that Zhangsan doesn't wonder whether Lisi bought H. or iP./which one Lisi bought}

② Scope marking structure in German

- (8) a. Was glaubt Ede, welchen Kurs Doris unterrichtet hat?
what believes Ede which course Doris taught has
"Which course does Ede believe Doris taught?"
b. Was glaubst Du, ob Pfrondorf gewonnen oder verloren hat?
what believe you whether Pfrondorf won or lost has
"Do you believe that Pfrondorf won or that Pfrondorf lost?"
(Beck & Kim, 2006)

③ Bad under *if* and *probably/might* & good under *no matter* in Chinese.

- (9) ta dagai xihuan {Zhangsan ✓ *huozhe* / **haishi* Lisi / **shei*}.
he probably/might like Zhangsan huozhe haishi Lisi whom
"He probably likes Zhangsan or Lisi / someone."
(10) bulun Zhangsan ?*huozhe* / ✓ *haishi* Lisi / ✓ *shei* lai, dou buyao darao wo.
no-matter Zhangsan huozhe haishi Lisi who come all don't disturb I
"No matter Zhangsan or Lisi / who comes, don't disturb me."

④ Island effects in *wh*-Qs and AltQs

German: no island effects; AltQ reading possible

- (11) Fährst du nach Griechenland, um dort zu wandern oder zu segeln? **Adjunct island**
go you to Greece in-order there to hike or to sail
"Are you going to Greece in order to hike or sail there?" (Beck & Kim, 2006)
(12) Braucht Stephan ein Spray, das Mücken oder Fliegen töten kann? **Complex NP island**
need Stephan a Spray the mosquito or fly kill can
"Does Stephan need a spray that can kill the mosquito or the fly?"
(13) Weiß deine Schwester, was Allergien oder Erkältungen auslösen kann? **Wh-island**
know your sister what allergy or cold cause can
"Does your sister know what can cause allergy or cold?"
(14) Ist es ihr schlimmer, dass Hans seine Mutter oder seinen Vater belügt? **Sentential subject island**
is it for-her worse that Hans his mother or his father lie
"Is it worse for her that Hans lies to his mother or his father?"

Problem: Why is there no overt movement if the disjunctive phrases are *wh*-phrases?
→ See below.

Chinese:

Questionnaire conducted for seeing the behavior of *wh*-phrases and disjunctive phrases embedded in islands

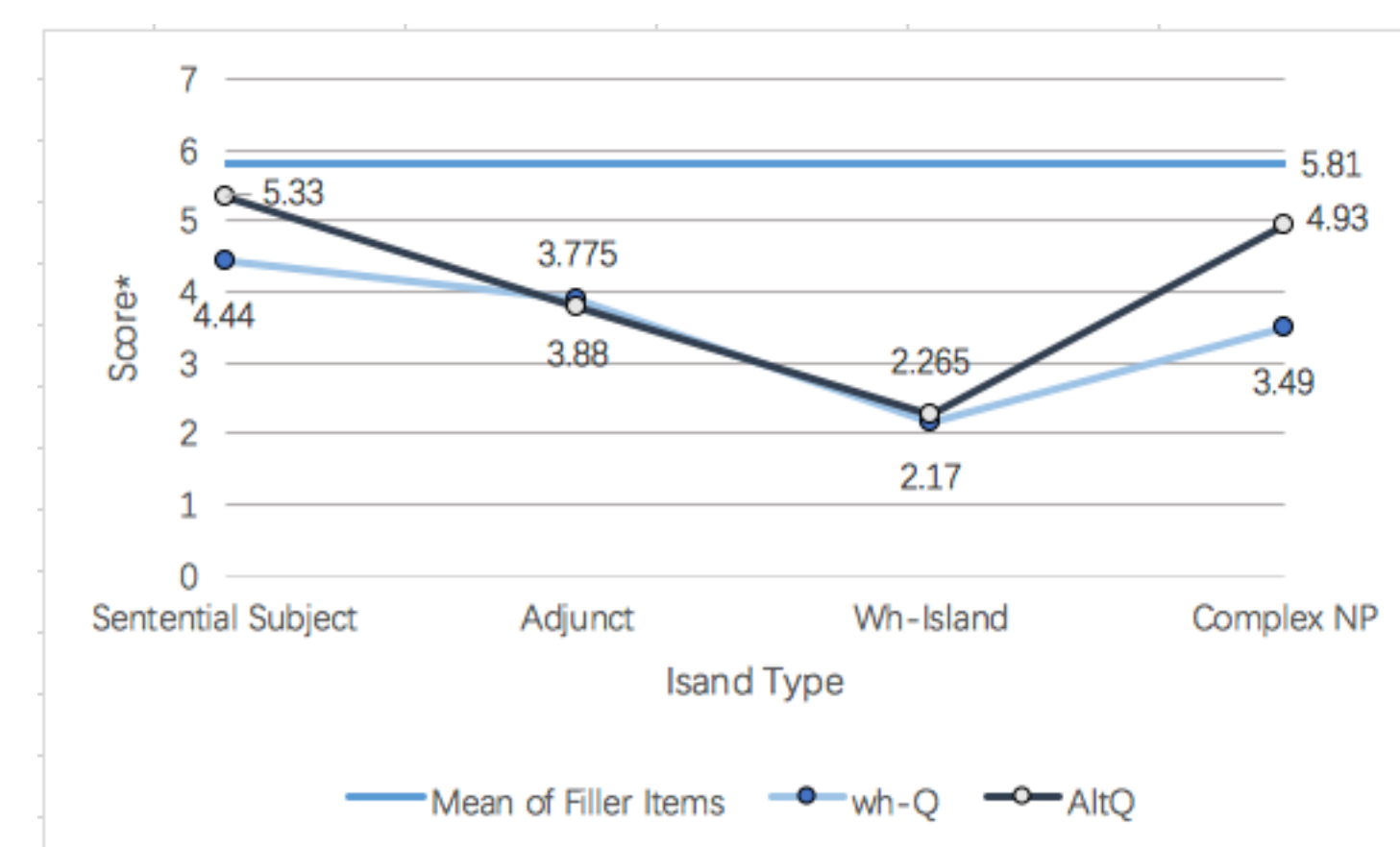
→ *Wh*-island effect is the strongest as predicted in literature (e.g. Erlewine (2014)) (see (6)).

→ Other islands are acceptable to different degrees. Factors like context complexity and sentence appropriateness in the contexts (originally designed of AltQs) also play a role.

→ Although the scores are not always the same, *wh*-Qs and AltQs embedded in islands follow the same general pattern in terms of degree of acceptability.

	Version 1	Version 2
1	WH-sentential 4.53	ALT-sentential 5.25
2	WH-adjunct 4.06	ALT-adjunct 3.9
3	FI * 5.95	FI 5.24
4	ALT-Complex NP 4.76	WH-Complex NP 3.1
5	FI 5.35	FI 5.29
6	FI 6.3	FI 6.82
7	ALT-sentential 5.41	WH-sentential 4.35
8	ALT-adjunct 3.65	WH-adjunct 3.7
9	WH-wh-island 2.59	ALT-wh-island 2
10	FI 5.4	FI 4.76
11	ALT-wh-island 2.53	WH-wh-island 1.75
12	FI 5.8	FI 5.41
13	FI 6.85	FI 6.53
14	FI 5.9	FI 6.65
15	WH-Complex NP 3.88	ALT-Complex NP 5.1
16	FI 5.4	FI 5.29

* FI = Filler Items
Table 1. Questionnaire Design and Score



* Scores here are the average of the *wh*-Qs and the AltQs of the same island type.
Figure 1. Means of Targets and mean of all FIs

Interpreting *wh*-phrases in-situ without movement

Han & Romero (2004) propose that there is an invisible *whether* in disjunctive phrases which undergoes movement.

However, there is no island effects.

Question: Why is there no overt/covert movement if the disjunctive phrases are *wh*-phrases?

Baker (1970): There exists a Q morpheme in every question and it functions as a **Q Op**. It is realized as Q particles in *wh* in-situ languages and is replaced by a *wh*-phrase in *wh*-movement languages.

→ The Q morpheme in Y/NQs is replaced by *whether* (or something like that in other languages)

→ **Han and Romero (2004):** an invisible *whether* (or other *wh*-phrase) in matrix Y/NQs and AltQs in English

→ **Evidence:** Early Modern English, Yiddish and Hindi

Cheng (1991): There exists a Q morpheme. If a language has a Q particle for Y/NQs, it doesn't have *wh*-movement in *wh*-Qs. If a language has a Q particle for Y/NQs, it must also have (c)overt Q particle for *wh*-Qs.

→ The Q morpheme in *wh* in-situ languages is realized as Q particles.

→ The one in *wh*-movement languages is realized through Spec-Head Agreement with a moved *wh*-phrase.

A combination of Cheng (1991) and Baker (1970):

There exist a Q morpheme/Op in every questions which needs to be activated.

Q Op in *wh*-movement languages needs to be activated by a *wh*-phrase (through *wh*-movement or a base generated *whether*). The one in *wh* in-situ languages needs to be activated by a(n) (overt or covert) question particle.

→ *Wh*-phrases in-situ in either type of language don't need to move because the activated Q Op can interpret them and determine their scope.

→ *Whether* (or something like that in other languages) is base generated in Spec-CP because there is no island effects.

Remaining Questions

- The (obligatory and optional) occurrence of question particles in Chinese

- Optional in matrix *wh*-Qs

(14) ni xiang zhidao shenme (*ne*) ?
you want know what Q-Particle
"What do you want?"

- Mandatory in matrix Y/NQs

(14) ni xiang zhidao *ma* ?
you want know Q-Particle
"Do you want to know?"

- Mandatorily absent in embedded *wh*-Qs

(14) ni xiang zhidao ta shi shei.
you want know he COPULA who
"You want to know who he is."

- Mandatorily absent in embedded Y/NQs (another strategy)

(14) ni xiang zhidao ta {lai le *meiyou* / lai *mei* lai}.
you want know he come ASP. not come not come
"You want to know whether he has come."

- The ungrammaticality of a sentence with both a *wh*-phrase and a disjunctive phrase

(14) *ni xiang zhidao shei xihuan A *haishi* B?
you want know who like A haishi B
Intended: Is it A or is it B that you wonder who likes?