The correlation of syntactic position and semantic function of wh-phrases in Tundra Nenets multiple questions

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Tundra Nenets (Uralic, Northern Samoyedic) is an SOV language in which wh-phrases can occur at more syntactic positions in genuine content questions. Although wh-phrases remain by default *in situ*, they can also appear in the clause initial position (Nikolaeva 2014; Mus 2015). As the literature suggests, the position of wh-phrases in multiple questions seems also to be free, and there is no asymmetries in multiple questions (Nikolaeva 2014). Based on novel data, I will show that the order of wh-phrases in Tundra Nenets multiple questions is influenced by their semantic(-pragmatic) features, i.e. the more specific wh-phrase precedes the less specific one(s). Therefore, the wh-phrases in multiple questions cannot occur freely.

According to the literature, wh-phrases can either remain *in situ* (1), or occupy the sentence initial position (2) in genuine content questions (Nikolaeva 2014; Mus 2015). Although the constituents of the clause in (2) surface in a non-canonical OSV order, there seems to be no difference in the discourse-pragmatic interpretation of (1) and (2).

(1)	Sergei	xib'a-mʔ	men'e?	(2)	xib'a-mʔ	Sergei	men'e?
	Sergey	who-acc	love.3sg		who-acc	Sergey	love.3sg
	'Whom does Sergey love?'				'Whom does Sergey love?'		

Similarly, wh-phrases in multiple questions can appear in different orders: in (3) the wh-subject *xib'a* is followed by the wh-object *xib'amʔ*, while in (4) their order is reversed, i.e. the wh-object precedes the wh-subject, and so the non-canonical OSV order is realised again. As the literature suggests it, the discourse-pragmatic interpretation of the clauses in (3) and (4) are equal.

(3)	xib'a	xib'a-mʔ	men'e?	(4)	xib'a-mʔ	xib'a	men'e?
	who	who-acc	love.3sg		who-acc	who	love.3sg
	'Who loves whom?'				'Who loves whom?'		

This is, however, not the case in the following minimal pair:

(5)	ŋamge-mʔ	xanźerʔ	pær-ŋa-nʔ	(6)	xanźerʔ	ŋamge-mʔ	pær-ŋa-nʔ
	what-acc	how	do-co-2sg		how	what-acc	do-co-2sg
	'How did you do what?'				'How did you do something?'		

It is only the clause in (5), that is interpreted as a multiple question, while the clause in (6) – exhibiting the reversed order of the wh-phrases in (5) – represents a single content question.

Following É. Kiss (1993), I will argue, that the order of the wh-phrases in Tundra Nenets multiple questions correlates with their specificity, i.e. the first wh-phrase has to be more specific than the second one. Since the VP-adverbial 'how' cannot be more specific than the wh-object 'what' in, the wh-adverbial cannot precede the wh-object in general. In clauses in which a wh-adverbial precedes a wh-object – as in (6) – the object gets an indefinite interpretation, and the clause is not interpreted as a multiple question.

References

É. Kiss, Katalin 1993. Wh-movement and specificity. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 11: 85–120. · Mus Nikolett 2015. *Interrogative words and content questions in Tundra Nenets*. PhD Dissertation, University of Szeged. · Nikolaeva, Irina 2014. *A Grammar of Tundra Nenets*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.