

Multiple Structural Positions of *Wh*-Phrases: Hittite-Armenian Connection?

Andrej V. Sideltsev
Institute of Linguistics, RAN, Moscow

0. Introduction.

Both Armenian and Hittite attest a very curious distribution of *wh*-phrases within the clause – it is both preverbal and clause first/initial. In the talk I will explore whether the similarity is only linear or structural and whether it can be assessed as an areal feature.

1. Armenian *wh*-phrases.

1.1. Focus movement.

The first position of *wh*-phrases in Eastern Armenian is clause internal, in front of the auxiliary, if it is present in the clause (Megerdooonian 2011):

- (1) *Ara-n vor girk'-n e kartatsel ?*
Ara-DEF[NOM] which book-DEF[ACC] is read
“Which book did Ara read?” after (Megerdooonian, Ganjavi 2009a).

The position is shown by a battery of tests to be in Spec,vP within the vP layer (Megerdooonian, Ganjavi 2009b). Spec,vP for Armenian is a dedicated focus position (Kahnemuyipour 2006, Megerdooonian, Ganjavi 2009b), cf. (Megerdooonian 2011). In Armenian the movement to Spec,vP is obligatory, but *wh*-phrases do not display movement effects (Megerdooonian, Ganjavi 2009a).

1.2. Scrambling of *wh*-phrases.

In Armenian, after targeting the specifier of the low focus phrase, *wh*-phrases can scramble on to higher projections, information structure related (Kahnemuyipour 2006, Megerdooonian, Ganjavi 2009b). *This* movement is optional.

- (2) *um ir k'uyr-ə krakets ?*
whom his sister-[DEF]NOM shot
“Who did his sister shoot at?” after (Megerdooonian, Ganjavi 2009a).

The movement of *wh*-phrase is accompanied by the movement of the auxiliary (Megerdooonian 2011):

- (3) *Vor girk'-n e Ara-n kartatsel ?*
which book-DEF[ACC] is Ara-DEF[NOM] read
“Which book did Ara read?” after (Megerdooonian, Ganjavi 2009a).

Megerdooonian, Ganjavi (2009a): structurally the clause initial position is Spec,TopP because clause initial *wh*-phrases are D-linked. Cf. Spec,FocP as the landing site in (Karimi, Taleghani 2007; Megerdooonian, Ganjavi 2009b).

2. Hittite.

2.1. As was demonstrated by (Hoffner 1995, Goedegebuure 2009), Hittite attests both preverbal (4) and clause initial (5) *wh*-phrases:

- (4) NH/NS (CTH 89.A) KUB 21.29(+) rev. iv 13-14
šummeš=kan kui-t ney-ari
you.DAT¹.PL=LOC what-NOM.SG.N happen-3SG.PRS.MED
“What will happen to you?”
- (5) OH/NS (CTH 337.1.A) KUB 48.99 obv 6-7
kui-š=war=an hara-n ^DPirwa[-i] ^{URU}Haššuw-aza uwate-z[zi]
who-NOM.SG=QUOT=him eagle-ACC.SG Pirwa-DAT.SG Hassu-ABL bring-3SG.PRS

“**Who** will bring the eagle from the city of Hassu to Pirwa?”

Huggard (2011): Hittite is a *wh*-in-situ language. The basic position is preverbal as in (4). It is construed as base generated (Huggard 2011). Clause initial/first position, as in (5), is the result of focus movement to Spec,ForceP.

I argued in (Sideltsev 2014) that Hittite cannot be described as per (Huggard 2011). It rather provides the exact parallel to Armenian: the preverbal position of *wh*-phrases is the contrastive focus position whereas the clause first/initial position is that of informational additive focus. Both focus positions are independently established for Hittite, see (Goedegebuure 2014). Cross-linguistically, both focus positions are argued to host *wh*-phrases, see. e.g., (Kahnemuyipour 2009).

2.2. Preverbal *wh*-phrases are *ex situ* in Hittite.

As Hittite is a dead language with a fairly limited corpus, standard means to determine whether preverbal *wh*-phrases are *in situ* or *ex situ* are inapplicable. There are two fairly indirect reasons to believe that the preverbal position of *wh*-phrases in Hittite is *ex situ*, see for the negative data (Sideltsev 2014).

2.2.1. Preverb position as a diagnostic.

(Huggard 2014): preverbs are a type of vP adverb marking the left edge of the vP domain;

(Sideltsev 2014): preverbs are heads of PrvP within the TP layer, higher than NegP. In either account, preverbs mark the left edge of the vP/TP domain. (6) shows that *wh*-phrases are higher than preverbs:

- (6) MH/MS (CTH 186³) HKM 43 obv. 1’-5’
n=[aš]ta ^mTarul[i²]y[a]š² *tuzzi-n* ^mZilapiyašš=a
 CONN=LOC Taruliya.GEN.SG army-ACC.SG.C Zilapiya.GEN.SG=and
 ÉRIN^{MEŠ} GIBIL *maḥhan* *šarā* *uwat-er*
 troops new how up bring-3PL.PST

“**How** could they have brought up the army of Taruli(ya) and the new troops of Zilapiya?”.

Thus (6) appears to establish that preverbal *wh*-phrases are structurally in a position out of vP, i.e. *ex situ*. But (Sideltsev, to appear) provided some arguments in favor of preverbs being adjuncts to VP, i.e. one of the lowest constituents in the clause architecture. In this account ex. (6) may attest the *wh*-phrase *in situ*.

2.2.2. Verb position as a diagnostic.

More decisive evidence for the out-of-vP position of *wh*-phrases is provided by verb movement:

- (7) NH/NS (CTH 63.A) KUB 19.31+ rev. iii 27”-31”
nu *k[ū]n* *memiya-n* *kuwat* *iya-tten* *QATAMMA*
 CONN this.ACC.SG.C matter-ACC.SG.C why do-2PL.PST in.this.way

“So, why have you **handled** this matter in this way: (you keep taking those civilian captives away from Tuppi-Teššub)?”.

As *QATAMMA* in (7) introduces the elaboration of the idea, it stands for *kiššan*, not *apeniššan* and it is *not* replacing focus, see (Goedegebuure 2014). So it is not in Spec,FocP, but rather adjoins to TP or to vP, i.e. is in the canonical manner adverb position.

The verb is obviously *ex situ*. Since the inflectional domain is head final (Sideltsev 2014), the verb can only target Fin. So the *wh*-word is *ex situ*, higher than Fin, most likely in Spec,FocP.

2.2.2.1. Other clause internal verbs.

Wh-words can still be postverbal, as the following example shows

- (8) OH/NS (CTH 19.II.A) KBo 3.1+ obv. i 40
 (They made a bad deed: they killed Mursili, they made blood(shed). And Hantili became afraid. [...] When Hantili came to Tagarama, he started to ask:)

[k]-ī=wa *iya-nun* *kuīt*
 this-ACC.SG.N=QUOT do-1SG.PST why
 “ ‘Why did I do this?’ ”

However, the difference between (7) and (8) is of information structure nature: in (7) the *wh*-word is narrow focus of the clause and thus sits in Spec,FocP whereas the verb is informational focus and sits in Fin. In (8) the *wh*-word is still narrow focus and targets the same position, Spec,FocP, whereas the verb is topical and sits in Top. It brings about the difference in word order: the verb in Fin follows the *wh*-word in (7) whereas the verb in Top precedes it in (8).

2.2.2.2. Is (7) Relevant for All *Wh*-Phrases?

However, (7) need not be relevant for the placement of any *wh*-phrase. As is known, the external Merge position of “why” can be situated higher than that of other *wh*-words and is higher than the canonical subject position, NegP, but lower than FocP, see, e.g., (Shlonsky, Soare 2011). Thus the data in 2.2.2-2.2.2.1 might be relevant only for “why”, and not for other *wh*-phrases.

2.2.3. Still the position of *wh*-phrases coincides with the dedicated preverbal focus position, which is normally construed in Hittite as Spec,FocP, see, e.g., (Huggard 2011; Sideltsev 2014). It is seemingly contradicted by the data where both *wh*-phrases and replacing focus co-occur¹:

(9) a NH/NS (CTH 40) KBo 5.6 obv. iii 52

kuwat=wa *apeniššan* *TAQBI*
 why=QUOT in.that.way speak
 “Why have you spoken in that way?”

(9) b NH/NS (CTH 127) Bo 2810 obv. 8-9

nu=mu DUMU=YA *kuwat* *iya-t* *apeneššuwan*
 CONN=me son=my why do-3SG.PST that.way
 “Why has my son acted that way towards me?”

(9) c NH/NS (CTH 127) Bo 2810 obv. 9-10

INA UD.1.KAM=*pat*=*ašta* *kuwat* GAM=*an* *ēš-ta*
 on one day=EMPH=LOC why down be-3SG.PST
 “Why did it (namely the grain) remain with (you) even as much as one day?”

(9) d MH/MS (CTH 190) HKM 52 obv 10-18

(There in your administrative district, there is only one ‘House of the Scribe.’ Others are oppressing (it/him) in your town. Are *šahhan* and *luzzi* (incumbent) upon scribes?)
apiya=*ma*=*at* *kuwat* *i-šša-i*
 there=but=it why do-IMPF-3SG.PRS
 “Why does he perform it there?”

Wh-phrases in (9a-c) occupy Spec,TopP being D-linked. In (9b) the verb is also topical and thus is in Top, bringing about its clause internal position. The replacing focus in (9a-b) sits in Spec,FocP whereas the restricting one in (9c) is in Spec,ForceP. In (9c) the *wh*-word is then in Spec,FocP. (9d) is ambiguous. Here *apiya*=*ma* can in principle sit both in is counter-expectant focus (Spec,FocP), and in contrastive topic (Spec,ForceP) positions. So it is in principle compatible with Spec,FocP as the position *wh*-phrases target.

Thus I believe the data do not provide evidence for *wh*-phrases sitting in Spec,whP, distinct from FocP, as is supposed for some other languages, see, e.g., (Shlonsky, Soare 2011).

In sentences without narrow DP focus, preverbal *wh*-phrase position is always identical to that of preverbal contrastive focus, see already (Goedegebuure 2009). Thus, structurally, it is likely to be in Spec,FocP.

3. Hittite: Summary.

Hittite *wh*-phrases are in the two positions in the clause which are focus positions: informational

¹ Cf. Armenian where *wh*-phrases and focus cannot co-occur, see (Megerdooomian 2011).

focus position (Spec,ForceP) and contrastive focus position (Spec,FocP). In case of D-linked *wh*-phrases, they scramble to Spec,TopP.

4. Hittite and Armenian.

Thus both Hittite and Armenian attest *wh*-phrases in two positions, the lower one is the dedicated focus position and is located at different height in Armenian and Hittite – within CP in Hittite and within vP in Armenian. The different placement of dedicated focus position in the clause is well attested, the high focus position in Spec,FocP has become standard, for a low focus position in Spec,vP see (Belletti 2003, Brody, Szabolcsi 2003, Butler 2004, Jayaseelan 2006-8).

The other position is at the left edge of the clause – it actually masks different positions for Hittite – Spec,TopP and Spec,ForceP. For Armenian it is either Spec,TopP or Spec,FocP.

So far, the parallel has been purely typological. But, diachronically, Modern Eastern Armenian double position of *wh*-phrases directly goes back to the Old Armenian state of affairs, not standardly described, but clearly present in the texts, see, e.g., the following examples:

- (10) Ezn. 124
zayn andēr oč' caneaw ?
 that.ACC.SG why NEG know.AOR.MED.3SG
 “Why didn’t he know that?” (Jensen 1959: 192)
- (11) *z-inč' dok'a ambastanen zk'ēn ?*
 ACC-what these rebuke.PRS.3PL you.ABL
 “What do these witness against thee?”

Thus the Modern Eastern Armenian system can be projected 1600 years back and has a chance of being compared with Hittite not only typologically.

5. An areal feature?

The double position is also attested in Modern Persian (Karimi, Taleghani 2007; Megerdooian, Ganjavi 2009a, b)². The fact that the structure was not inherited from Proto-Iranian is obvious: *wh*-words are strictly clause initial in Avestan (West 2011: 51-52; Hale 1987: 32-3, 50-1; Reichelt 1967: 288, 354). No Old Persian questions with *wh*-phrases are attested (Kent 1953; Hale 1987: 57). However, Middle Persian, only slightly chronologically predating Old Armenian already attests preverbal *wh*-words alongside clause initial ones (Erschler 2012: 690; Skjærvø 2007: 141; Rastorgueva, Molchanova 1981: 89, 90).

But the double positioning of *wh*-words is also attested in Eastern Middle Iranian languages (Khotanese and Sogdian) and in all Modern Iranian languages (Erschler 2012: 691-3). Thus a very cross-linguistically rare construction is attested in the languages from the contact area of Asia Minor-Caucasus-Iran.

(Dryer 2013): the double positioning of *wh*-phrases (mixed type) is a distinctly minor strategy as different from either initial, *in situ* or preverbal (= focus) placement. Languages of the mixed type exhibit some geographical clustering: “(i) there are a number in the general vicinity of Indonesia and the western Pacific; and (ii) there are also a number in West Africa” (Dryer 2013). The data described in the talk obviously provide another cluster. So a question naturally arises whether the fact that a new cluster is in a geographically adjacent area is a mere coincidence. Speculative due to lack of data³ and the chronological discrepancy⁴, but it agrees well with other similarities of the clause architecture. Cf. double position of subordinators (preverbally and clause initially) in Ossetic, Kartvelian (Erschler 2012) and Hittite. Cf. also

² See for Persian as involving movement of the *wh*-phrase to a preverbal focus position and thus attesting focus-movement (Kahnemuyypour 2009: 153) with ref. Cf. (Karimi, Taleghani 2007).

³ Hurrian *wh*-words are clause initial, but they are attested only four times (Giorgieri 2000: 222; Hazenbos 2005: 144; Wegner 2007: 85) and not of them are totally clear. No Urartian or Hattian *wh*-words are attested so far (Hazenbos 2005: 144; Soysal 2004).

⁴ Naturally, even with Middle Persian data there is still a chronological gap of more than a thousand years between the Hittite data and the data of Persian/Armenian.

auxiliary marking focus in Armenian, Azerbaijani, Aramaic, Udi, and Iranian languages of northwestern Iran (some Tati and Talyshi dialects, Gilaki) (Stilo 2008; Megerdooomian 2011).

In case the double position of *wh*-phrases is a common isogloss, it is different from the isogloss of Erschler: Armenian does not attest double position of subordinators, they are strictly clause initial, whereas Ossetic and Kartvelian languages do not attest double position of *wh*-words (Erschler 2012: 677). It is only Hittite and Middle Persian⁵ that combine both features.

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⁵ See for the latter (Erschler 2012: 690-1).