Topic, Focus, and Wh-Phrases in Cham (and Moken)

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Introduction

- Eastern Cham is said to be a *wh*-in-situ language (e.g. Thurgood 2005: 10)

(1) ʰɨ nɨŋ thaw băŋ Ɂet
    2sg think dog eat what
    ‘What do you think the dog ate?’ (BT_20141107)

- But, *wh*-phrases may be fronted (2)

(2) Ɂet ʰɨ nɨŋ thaw băŋ
    what 2sg think dog eat
    ‘What do you think the dog ate?’ (BT_20141107)

- Claim: fronted *wh*-phrases are *wh*-topics

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1Orthography is largely IPA; in line with traditional Cham linguistic orthography (Brunelle, Thurgood, Moussay), open circles beneath consonants indicate falling, breathy tone on the following vowel. Examples are marked for speaker and date. Note that there is significant register variation between speakers (cf. Brunelle 2009, and others).
Introduction

- *Wh*-phrases are taken to be diagnostic for focus (e.g. Horvath 1986, Cheng 1997, Bošković 2002)
  - But, cf. Cable (2008), and others

- *Wh*-phrases are taken to be diagnostic for *not* topic (e.g. Kiss 1998)
  - But, cf. Grohmann (2006), and others

- Theoretical claim: (Eastern Cham) *wh*-phrases are orthogonal to topic/focus
  - Using a test involving discourse relations (López 2009; Asher & Lascarides 2005)
Quick outline

- **Introduction to Eastern Cham**
  - Focus & Topic fronting

- **Discourse anaphora test**
  - Segmented Discourse Representation Theory (SDRT)
  - Data from Catalán (López 2009)

- **Cham data**
  - DP left-dislocation
  - *Wh*-phrase left-dislocation
  - Additional tests
    - Deixis
    - D-linked *wh*-phrases

- **Conclusions**
  - Methodological thoughts
Eastern Cham

- Austronesian: Vietnam, spoken by about 100,000 people (Brunelle & Văn Hẳn 2015)

- Data from fieldwork in San Francisco & Seattle (2014-5), Ho Chi Minh City & Phan Rang, Vietnam (2015)

- SVO, no bound morphology (3a-b)

  (3a) /payuol  doeyʔ/  pangolin  run
  ‘The pangolin runs.’ (MST_20141001)

  (3b)  lĩmóŋ piʔ  miʔ  payuol
        lion    catch    pangolin
  ‘The lion caught the pangolin.’ (MST_20141001)
Eastern Cham *wh*-phrases

- *Wh*-phrases as in-situ, but may be fronted (4a-c)

(4a) *hi nɨŋ thaw bāŋ Ɂet*

2sg think dog eat what

‘What do you think the dog ate?’ (BT_20141107)

(4b) *hi nɨŋ Ɂet thaw bāŋ*

(4c) *Ɂet hi nɨŋ thaw bāŋ*

- *Wh*-indefinites (5a-b)

(5a) *thay naw Ɂara?*

who go market buy what

‘Who went to the market to buy what/something?’ (MST_20141008)

(5b) *hu thay bāŋ pɔh ɔʔ ʊʔ o*

FOC who eat fruit mango NEG

‘Nobody ate the mango.’ (DTHS_20150609)
Eastern Cham has a dedicated focus construction

- Focus is marked by *hu* ‘have, ex.cop’; identificational semantics (6)

(6a) $hi \ hu \ cũ? \ pštaw \ mštay$
    
    2sg foc shoot king die

‘It was you who shot the king dead.’

(6b) $kra \ ʈhin \ hu \ āla \ cōh$
    
    monkey foc snake bite

‘It was the monkey the snake bit.’

Speaker: “I know you shot the king dead.”

Speaker: “It was exactly the monkey the snake bit.”

(MST_20140924)

(MST_20141029)

- Incompatible with ‘only’, ‘also’, or singular sets (e.g. ‘sun’)

(7) $tha \ ʈrey \ alamin \ hu \ krāʔ \ ōi \ pātih \ ҝay \ (#mîn/#ray)$
    
    1 clf Alamin foc teach math only/also

‘It is [only/also] Alamin who teaches math.’ (MST_20150419)

(8) $ʔya \ hāray \ (#hu) \ ōah$
    
    sun foc shine

Intended: ‘It is the sun that is shining.’ (MST_20150419)
Eastern Cham has a distinct topic position

- Topic fronting is unmarked,\(^2\) separated by pause (9)

(9) \textit{krɪy ni // hi hu băŋ}
orange dem 2sg foc eat
‘Was it you who ate this orange?’ (MST_20141203)

- Cannot be the answer to a \textit{wh}-question (10a-b)

(10a) \textit{keit hi ṭo? băŋ}
what 2sg prog eat
A: ‘What are you eating?’

(10b) \textit{kaw ṭo? băŋ lɔ nu? #lɔ nu?, kaw ṭo? băŋ}
1sg prog eat meat chicken
B: ‘I’m eating chicken.’ (NNA_20150615)

\(^2\)Topic is marked overtly by \textit{kɪŋ} in the closely related Western Cham (author’s fieldwork; Baumgartner 1998)\(^8\)
Discourse anaphora in SDRT

- Segmented Discourse Representation Theory (SDRT) as a discourse-level semantic model (Asher & Lascarides; cf. DRT, e.g. Kamp & Reyle 1993)

- Consider the following discourse

  (11) a. Max had a great evening last night.
      b. He had a great meal.
      c. He ate salmon.
      d. He devoured lots of cheese.
      e. He then won a dancing competition. (Asher & Lascarides 2005: 8)
Discourse anaphora in SDRT, cont’d

- Discourse coordination (here, “narration”) and discourse subordination (here, “elaboration”)

![Diagram](image.png)

Figure 4.5: The SDRS (17), represented as a graph
Discourse anaphora in SDRT, cont’d

● Discourse Coordination
  ○ Narration (a, then b…)
  ○ Continuation (a does x, b does y…)
  ○ Background (a overlaps with b; e.g. “Max entered the room. It was pitch dark.”)

● Discourse Subordination
  ○ Elaboration (b is a subpart of a)
  ○ Explanation (b is the cause of a)
  ○ Result (b is the result of a)

● Discourse subordination results in anaphoric accessibility
  ○ Discourse anaphora may only refer to an entity that is anaphorically accessible

● Discourse coordination does not
Discourse anaphora in Catalán

- Catalán clitic left-dislocation and right-dislocation (CLLD & CLRD) (López 2009; elsewhere described as topic positions; e.g. Rizzi 1997)
  - Discourse coordination contexts: #CLLD/CLRD

(12a) **Narration**

*El Joan va cuinar la carn.*
‘Joan cooked the meat.’

(12b)#Després se la va menjar, la carn.

Afterwards CL CL.ACC PAST eat.INF the meat
‘Afterwards he ate the meat.’ (López 2009: (2.62))

(13a) **Continuation**

*El gos li va mossegar la ma.*
‘The dog bit his hand.’

(13b)#i el gat se la va esgarrapar, la ma.

and the cat CL CL.ACC PAST scratch.INF the hand
‘and the cat scratched his hand.’ (López 2009: (2.64))

³Note, I have checked the Catalán examples with a fluent non-native speaker, Justin Davidson.
Discourse anaphora in Catalán, cont’d

- Catalan discourse subordination contexts: ✓CLLD/CLRD

(14a) Elaboration

*El Joan va cuinar* mai carn.*

‘Joan cooked the meat.’

(14b) La fa molt be, el Joan, la carn.

*cl.acc* makes very well the Joan the meat

‘He cooks the meat very well.’ (López 2009: (2.65))

(15a) Explanation

*El Joan no cina* mai carn.

‘Joan never cooks meat.’

(15b) Això és perquè és vegetarìa, el Joan.

thus is because is vegetarian the Joan

‘That’s because Joan is vegetarian.’ (López 2009: (2.66))
The discourse anaphora test

- López (2009) reduces “topic” to a [+a] discourse anaphora feature
  - [+a] = anaphoric accessibility

- Wh-phrases, may not undergo CLLD/CLRD and therefore must be [-a]

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Eastern Cham data

- Eastern Cham topic-fronting passes the discourse anaphora test
  - Discourse coordination contexts: #topic-fronting

(16a) \textit{kɛn ni \ ηa? \ ʔiŋ \ ʔɔ̀ŋ \ plɔh} \quad \textit{Narration}
Kenny make ing-aong before
‘Kenny cooked the ing-aong [frog sp.]’

(16b) \textit{ǔni, saʔay \ ʔɔʔ \ băŋ \ ʔiŋ \ ʔɔ̀ŋ} \quad \#\textit{ǔni, ʔiŋ ʔɔ̀ŋ, saʔay \ ʔɔʔ \ băŋ}
now brother prog eat ing-aong
‘Now, he’s eating the ing-aong [frog sp.]’ (HL_20151127)

(17a) \textit{myaw \ mɨh, \ kaw \ băŋ \ ɬo \ nuʔ} \quad \textit{Continuation}
first 1sg eat meat chicken
‘First, I ate the chicken.’

(17b) \textit{plɔh \ năn, \ ay \ băŋ \ ɬo \ nuʔ} \quad \#\textit{plɔh năn, \ ɬo \ nuʔ, \ ay \ băŋ}
after dem brother eat meat chicken
‘Then, my brother ate the chicken.’ (NNA_20150615)
Eastern Cham data, cont’d

● Discourse subordination contexts: ✓ topic-fronting

(18a) mɔŋ kɛn ni ŋaʔ ʔiŋ ʔɔ̀ŋ
look Kenny make ing-aong
‘Look at Kenny cooking the ing-aong [frog sp.].’

(18b) ŋu ŋaʔ ʔiŋ ʔɔ̀ŋ piŋi lo ✓ ʔiŋ ʔɔ̀ŋ, ŋu ŋaʔ piŋi lo
3sg make ing-aong delicious very
‘He cooks the ing-aong [frog sp.] very well.’ (HL_20151127)

(19a) hi in ŋăŋ lo ŋu? lay
2sg want eat meat chicken Y/N
A: ‘Do you want to eat chicken?’

(19b) ŋiŋ o, kaw ŋăŋ yi? ✓ lo ŋu?, kaw ŋăŋ yi?
want NEG 1sg eat already
B: ‘No, I already ate (chicken).’ (NNA_20150615)
### Eastern Cham data, cont’d

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Eastern Cham data, cont’d

- **Wh-phrases likewise pass the discourse anaphora test**
  - Discourse coordination contexts: #wh-topic-fronting

(20a) *hyay ni ʔahla? ni? ʔa? hua? lo nu?*

day dem 1sg cook make eat meat chicken
A: ‘Today, I cooked chicken.’

(20b) *ploh nan zut ʔa? keit wi?*

after dem friend make what iter
B: ‘After that, what did you do?’ (TDK_20150625)

(21a) *si? hua? høy kan*

Si eat.rice with fish
A: ‘I (Si) ate (rice) with fish.’

(21b) *hua? ploh, hi ʔa? keit*

eat.rice after 2sg make what
B: ‘After eating, what did you do?’ (DPNS_20150623)
Discourse subordination contexts: ✓ *wh*-topic-fronting

(22a) `tahla? qa pih tsey ay pa? lam ni

1sg invite all y.b. o.b. to in DEM

A: ‘I invited everyone here.’ (I can’t invite anyone else)

(22b) thay, ploh zut qa

who after friend invite

B: ‘Who did you invite then?’ [fronting strongly preferred] (TDK_20150625)

(23a) sì bǎŋ tha só dô

Si eat 1 number(VN) food(VN)

A: ‘I (Si) ate some food.’

(23b) hi bǎŋ keit

2sg eat what

B: ‘What did you eat?’ (DPNS_20150623)
Eastern Cham data, cont’d

● *Wh*-topic-fronting acceptable in discourse subordination contexts

(24a) ṭahṭaʔ ɲyaw bāŋ klam ni

1sg just eat night DEM

A: ‘I just ate dinner.’ (TDK_20150625)

(24b) zut bāŋ ʢeit

dem friend eat what

B: ‘What did you eat?’

# if B didn’t hear A

✔ if asking what kind of food
Eastern Cham data, cont’d

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Eastern Cham data, cont’d

- If deixis can render a DP anaphorically accessible, then it should make topic-fronting acceptable
  - This is borne out for DP’s and wh-phrases

(25) *tha pɔh taw ni, kaw tɔʔ thɔw*

1 CLF stone DEM 1sg PROG hold.in.hand

‘This stone, I have in my hand.’ [physically] (NNA_20150915)

(26a) *kɛn ni tɔʔ băŋ  keiṭ*

Kenny PROG eat what

‘What are you (Kenny) eating?’ [Just walking into a room] (HL_20151008)

(26b) *keiṭ, kɛn ni tɔʔ băŋ*

what Kenny PROG eat

‘What are you (Kenny) eating?’ [Walking into a room, pointing at Kenny’s food] (HL_20151008)
Eastern Cham data, cont’d

- D-linked *wh*-phrases, particularly *which X* and *how many X* prefer fronting
  - Cf. elaboration

(27) ḻam pîh ḷom niʔ, niʔ hlay mɔŋ seh bǎŋ
    in all how many animal animal which tiger like eat
    ‘Of all the animals, which does the tiger like to eat?’ (PTHN_20150624)

(28) ḻam mi raŋ nan, ḷom raŋ hî seh
    in 5 person dem how many person 2sg like
    ‘Of the 5 people, how many do you like?’ (NNA_20150615)
Eastern Cham data: Summary

- Eastern Cham $wh$-phrases may be topic-fronted
  - According to the discourse anaphora test

- $Wh$-phrases are not always overtly focus-marked
  - At least in the ID-focus construction

- Eastern Cham $wh$-phrases seem completely orthogonal to topic and focus

- If $wh$-phrases are to be retained as a diagnostic for topic and focus, these facts must be accounted for
  (cf. also Cable 2008, Grohmann 2006, and others)
# Eastern Cham data: Summary

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Conclusion: Methodological thoughts

- Naive elicitation would miss this generalization
  - “Optional wh-movement” (e.g. Denham 1997)

- Naive text collection would also miss this generalization
  - Pro-drop is favored over topic fronting in narratives
  - No tokens of fronting in narratives so far

- Discourse anaphora test can be used in initial fieldwork
  - Produces reliable, clear results for Eastern Cham and Catalán
  - Can be further tested by more targeted elicitation and text collection
Acknowledgements

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References