Doubly Filled COMP in Czech and Slovenian interrogatives

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My talk investigates the syntax of Doubly Filled COMP patterns in Czech and Slovenian interrogatives from a cross-linguistic perspective: I will concentrate on the differences between Germanic and Slavic Doubly Filled COMP. In Germanic, dialects that allow the Doubly Filled COMP pattern do so in order to lexicalise a C head specified as [fin] with overt material, which is regularly carried out by verb movement in main clauses (e.g. V2 in German, T-to-C in English interrogatives) and by the interrogative complementiser in embedded polar questions (e.g. if). The insertion of the complementiser has no interpretive effect on the clause: it is the equivalent of the embedded wh-clause without an overt complementiser (which is the regular pattern in the standard varieties of West Germanic). Consider the English examples in (1):

(1) a. Which book did she buy?
   b. I don’t know **which book** (% **that**) she bought.

In both cases, the wh-phrase which book is in [Spec,CP], while the C head is filled by do in (1a), as an instance of T-to-C, and in (1b) the complementiser that is inserted in non-standard dialects. The complementiser cannot be inserted in (1a) since C is filled by the verb, and that is available only in embedded clauses. In both cases, the C is lexicalised by an element not specified as [wh]. By contrast, in Czech and Slovenian a particle (Czech že, Slovenian da, glossed here simply as ‘that’) can be inserted even in main clauses, and while its presence is optional, its insertion triggers an interpretive difference. Observe the examples from Czech:

(2) a. Kdo (že) přijel?
   who that arrived.3SG
   ‘Who arrived?’ / ‘Who is said to have arrived?’
   b. Ptala se, **kdo** (že) přijel.
   asked.3SG.F REFL who that arrived.3SG
   ‘She asked who arrived.’ / ‘She asked who was said to have arrived.’

I assume that the wh-element moves to [Spec,CP], following Rudin (1988); if že is inserted, it occupies the C head (Kaspar 2015). While (2a) without že is acceptable as an out of the blue question, with že it is essentially interpreted as an echo question (see Kaspar 2015, Gruet-Skrabalova 2011), and is an appropriate response to a statement such as ‘Peter arrived’. The same difference applies to the embedded versions in (2b). The pattern is available with any wh-element, and is independent of whether there are further elements between C and the verb, and where the verb is located exactly, as will be shown by further examples. The same conclusions are valid for Slovene (see Hladnik 2010). The availability of že and da in main clauses, as opposed to that and its equivalents in West Germanic, signals that these elements are present not merely to lexicalise a C head, and they are not regular subordinators either.

Apart from statements, questions can be responded by echo questions: this pattern involves the complementiser jestli in Czech and the element je in Slovenian (otherwise found in regular embedded polar interrogatives), and is restricted to main clauses. Consider the following examples (possible responses to a question such as ‘Did Peter arrive?’):

(3) a. Kdo (*že) jestli (*že) přijel?  (Czech)
   who that if that arrived.3SG
   ‘Did WHO arrive?’
Patterns similar to (3) and (4) are restricted to embedded clauses in Dutch substandard dialects, and the insertion of complementisers does not trigger interpretive differences: wie of (dat) ‘who whether ‘that’ appears in regular wh-clauses and of dat ‘whether that’ in polar questions (Hoekstra 1993). The fact that in Slovenian it is če and not a that appears in (3b) shows that the difference from ordinary interrogatives in encoded in the syntax, too.

I argue that in Germanic, the C head is specified as [wh] and this is checked off by the wh-element; in addition, the complementiser that is unspecified for [±wh] is inserted in order to lexicalise C. By contrast, in Slavic patterns like (2) the C head is not [wh] and filled accordingly by an element unspecified for [wh]; the movement of the wh-phrase is not triggered by a [wh] feature but by an [EDGE] feature that requires an element in the specifier position, either by virtue of movement or by directly inserting a yes-no operator (or both, in this case by multiple specifiers, where the wh-element is higher due to restrictions on scope). If želi da is present, the clause is not typed as [wh]: the wh-interpretation occurs only locally on the wh-element taking scope over the whole clause, the [wh] feature being interpretable on these elements, hence there is no need for checking the feature off. Echo questions are hence not true questions and are closer to focus constructions (cf. Artsein 2002). In Slovenian, če appears in dependent contexts: either in dependent clauses or in environments like (3b) where it is in the scope of the wh-element. In cases like (3), the absence of želi da follows from the [wh] nature of the clause, and this [wh] feature is checked off by a head (želi) or a specifier (če), hence the yes/no property is not an echo but a clause-typing element; on top of this, the wh-element is attracted to a specifier position via the [EDGE] feature and since the [wh] feature on the C head is already checked off, the [wh] of the element triggers a focal, echo interpretation.

References