Focus Fronting in Wh-Questions in Inuktitut*

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Contrary to previous work on word order in Inuktitut wh-questions (Gillon 1999, 2000), I argue that fronting of wh-words in Inuktitut is not wh-movement to Spec, CP for clause-typing or licensing, but it is focus-driven movement, most likely to a position adjoined to vP. I show that Inuktitut word order depends on the presence of topic/focus features. The unmarked order is subject-initial. The preferred position for wh-words and focused constituents is below the subject and above the verb. Following Rudin’s (1988) analysis of multiple wh-fronting languages, I assume that wh-words bear contrastive focus, and this causes them to move. The landing site cannot be Spec, CP, because then the subject would have to move even higher, i.e. adjoin to Spec, CP, which is the position for contrastive topics (Rudin 1993), but not ordinary subjects. Thus, this position has to be lower than Spec, TP.

1 Introduction

In this paper, I analyze word order in wh-questions in Inuktitut. Very little work has been done on this topic and on word order in Inuktitut in general, though the data from this language has interesting implications for the typology of wh-questions. Inuktitut has properties of a wh-in-situ language; however, fronting of wh-words into a pre-verbal position is preferred. I argue that this fronting is not wh-movement, and it is focus-driven (wh-words are generally assumed to be inherently contrastively focused). This account is in line with the analyses of multiple wh-fronting languages ((Horvath 1986 and E. Kiss 1995 for Hungarian, Rudin 1988 for Bulgarian, Stjepanovic 1998 for Serbo-Croatian, inter alia) and of languages with wh-in-situ characteristics and wh-fronting at the same time (Kahnemuyipour 2001 for Persian, Reglero 2003 for Basque).

I consider data from five dialects of Inuktitut (Mittimatalik, Siglitun, Uummarmiutun, West Greenlandic, South Baffin), relying mainly on my own fieldwork

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in South Baffin dialect. South Baffin is closely related to Mittimatalik (also called North Baffin). All South Baffin examples are from my fieldwork.

In Section 2, I review previous work on Inuktitut wh-questions (Mittimatalik, Siglitun and Uummarmiutun dialects). In Section 3, I present data from two other dialects, West Greenlandic and South Baffin. Word order in declarative sentences and its relation to word order in wh-questions is discussed in Section 4. Section 5 is devoted to the question how Inuktitut fits existing wh-typologies. In Section 6, I discuss the derivation of the preferred word order in wh-questions and the landing site for fronted wh-word. Section 7 contains conclusions and suggestions for future research.

A note on glosses: The Case marker -mit (Mittimatalik)/-mik (South Baffin) marks an object in antipassive, but in fact functions much like as Accusative marker (Spreng, p.c.). The Case marker -mut marks Allative Case. Nouns in Absolutive Case have a null Case marker (not glossed).

2 Previous work on wh-questions in Inuktitut

To the best of my knowledge, a theoretical account of Inuktitut wh-questions was given only by Gillon (1999, 2000), based on her fieldwork data from three dialects: Mittimatalik (North Baffin), Siglitun, and Uummarmiutun. Gillon mentions fieldwork on South Baffin by Cheng and Mirasugi, but it has not been published.

From Gillon's fieldwork data, it appears that word order is 'free' in declarative sentences and yes-no questions (all six orders of ordering subject, verb and object are possible), but it is more restricted in wh-questions: namely, a wh-word cannot be lower than the verb (with the exception of D-linked wh-words). The following examples are from Mittimatalik (Gillon 1999).

(1)  

a. Suusan Taivit-mik nagligusuk-vuq  
Susan David love-3sg.intr.indic.  
'Susan loves David'

b. Taivit-mik Suusan nagligusuk-vuq

c. Taivit-mik nagligusuk-vuq Suusan

d. nagligusuk-vuq Taivit-mik Suusan

e. nagligusuk-vuq Suusan Taivit-mik

f. Suusan nagligusuk-vuq Taivit-mik

(2)  

a. Piipi suna-mik qukir-sir-qau-vaa  
Phoebe what-acc shoot-ap-recpst-3sg.intr.interr.  
'What did Phoebe hit?'

b. suna-mik Piipi qukir-sir-qau-vaa

c. suna-mik qukir-sir-qau-vaa Piipi

d. *Piipi qukir-sir-qau-vaa suna-mik

e. *qukir-sir-qau-vaa Piipi suna-mik

f. *qukir-sir-qau-vaa suna-mik Piipi
A wh-word can be preceded by another, non-wh DP (either subject or object). Gillon assumes (following Baker's (1996) account of word order in polysynthetic languages) that DPs freely adjoin to the clause in Inuktitut, and this is why the word order is free (I will show later that this does not hold for Inuktitut). Thus, non-wh DPs can appear anywhere in the clause and their position, or, rather, the position of wh-words relative to them is not affected by wh-movement, if any. The fact that the wh-word has to be higher than the verb is taken by Gillon to be indicative of wh-movement to Spec, CP. However, she does not discuss to what position a non-wh DP preceding a wh-word (as in (2a)) moves.

Where there is more than one wh-word, in Gillon's data, all wh-words must move to a preverbal position. Thus, these dialects of Inuktitut show obligatory multiple wh-movement. She also argued that this movement obeys superiority (based on ungrammaticality of examples like (3d)).

(3)  a. kina kisu-mik niuvi-rqau-vaa
     who what-acc buy-pst-3sg.intr.interr.
     'Who bought what?'

b. *kina niuvi-rqau-vaa kisu-mik
c. *kisu-mik niuvi-rqau-vaa kina
d. *kisu-mik kina niuvi-rqau-vaa

Gillon argues that Inuktitut poses a problem for Cheng's (1997) clausal typing hypothesis: it shows properties of both multiple wh-movement and wh-in-situ languages (as described by Cheng), though Cheng claimed that any given language can employ only one strategy of typing a clause as interrogative.

Properties of multiple wh-movement languages include not only fronting of all wh-words. The semantic composition of Inuktitut wh-words is also like that of wh-words in multiple wh-movement languages (according to Cheng): a wh-word consists of only a variable in the lexicon, and an operator and a variable in the syntax. In wh-questions, wh-words compose with a null wh-operator; they can also compose with an operator to create indefinites or polarity items (see examples in (4) below).

(4)  a. kina kina-kiaq kina-tuinnaq
     who who-indef who-any
     'who' 'someone' 'anyone'

b. kisu kisu-mi-kiaq kisu-tuinnaq
   what what-acc-indef what-any
   'what' 'something' 'anything'

The presence of indefinites and polarity items created in this manner has been taken to imply the presence of such a null wh-operator. For Cheng (1997), this type of composition requires movement of all wh-words to the Spec,CP because the null wh-operators must be licensed in C.
A property of wh-in-situ languages is the presence of an interrogative particle, at least in yes-no questions, but often in wh-questions too. The interrogative particle types a sentence as interrogative, so wh-movement for this purpose is not required (according to Cheng 1997). Inuktitut has an equivalent of an interrogative particle: interrogative mood morphology on the verb (seen in the examples above), though it is absent in questions involving presupposition (in such questions, it is overridden by a presuppositional mood suffix). However, in Gillon's account, it is not clear if wh-words stay in situ, because, if DPs adjoin freely, how can it be determined which position is in situ? In this case, in-situ would mean the same freedom for wh-words as for non-wh DPs, which is not attested in these dialects.

Gillon suggests that Cheng's hypothesis, allowing only one wh-type per language, still stands if Inuktitut wh-questions are typed by a question particle (here, interrogative morphology) where possible and by wh-movement where impossible (that is, where the verb has a presuppositional suffix instead of an interrogative one. Movement of wh-words in the presence of a question particle happens for other reasons (not to type the clause), similarly to multiple wh-movement languages. According to Cheng (1991), this reason is the necessity of wh-operator licensing (and only first wh-word moves to type the clause). Alternatively, according to Rudin (1988), wh-words move for focus reasons, since they are inherently focused. Gillon mentions the second view, but does not pursue it. However, Rudin's view seems more promising for Inuktitut, especially given the data from its other dialects.

3 More data

The data from other dialects that I will introduce here somewhat changes the picture; however, in general, it is more or less consistent with the data collected by Gillon. Many researchers working on word order in flexible word-order languages report that grammaticality judgments vary: all speakers accept the basic order, but the degree of acceptability of marked orders is often different (from 'also possible' to 'worse' to 'ungrammatical'), presumably depending on a (pragmatic?) possibility of assigning a topic or focus feature. Dialects, though related, can differ, and here the difference is most likely the strength of the focus requirement. Besides word order, all the dialects discussed have the same characteristics, such as interrogative morphology on verbs, flexible word order, and indefinites and polarity items created by combination of wh-words with respective operators.

3.1 West Greenlandic (Fortesque 1984)

In West Greenlandic, according to Fortesque's descriptive grammar of this dialect, there are no restrictions on the positioning of wh-words in questions. A wh-word is generally in the same position as the corresponding constituent in a declarative sentence (i.e. in situ), and, as the latter, can be fronted for topic/focus purposes. A wh-initial order is illustrated in (5), and in (6), the wh-word is not in the highest position in the clause - though still in a preverbal position. (Unfortunately, Fortesque gives only a few examples.)
(5) kikkun-ni najugaqar-pit  
who-pl.loc live-2s.interr  
'Who are you staying with?'

(6) umiarsuaq qassi-nut aalla-ssa-vaa  
ship how.many-all. leave-fut.-2s.interr  
'When (what hour) does the ship leave?'

Fortesque reports that suuq 'why' prefers the initial position, and qanuq 'how' stands preferably just before the verb. In his examples, wh-words are often in the initial or at least preverbal position.

Therefore, West Greenlandic is an in-situ language, and wh-words in it move purely for focus reasons, i.e. the alleged wh-movement in some sentences is in fact focus movement. Since this movement is optional, there is no evidence for the necessity of wh-movement for the purposes of typing a clause as [+wh], or for the purposes of licensing wh-operators.

Multiple wh-questions are also possible in West Greenlandic. Fortesque gives only one example of such a question.

(7) kikkut sumunnar-pat  
who-pl. go.where-3p.interr  
'Who are going where?'

3.2 South Baffin (fieldwork)

In general, most word orders are acceptable, both in declarative sentences and in wh-questions, but the degree of acceptability varies more for the latter.

The word kina 'who' (in Absolutive Case), when it is the subject, is clearly preferred sentence-initially, both in single (8) and in multiple questions (9).

(8) a. kina qai-vaa?  
who come-3sg.interr  
'Who came?'

b. (???)qai-vaa kina?

(9) kina suna-mit sana-vaa  
who what-acc make-3s.interr  
'Who made what?'

The preference to move kina higher than other wh-words might lead to think that Inuktitut wh-movement obeys Superiority, but in fact, even in single wh-questions non-subject wh-words are preferably moved to a position higher than the verb and lower than the subject (I will discuss this position in Section 6). (10b) is rated less preferable than
(10a), but better than the rest, most probably because the subject is kept higher than all other lexical material. However, *sunamit* is still preferred to be in a pre-verbal position, since (10c, d) are judged better than (10e, f).

(10)  
   a.   anaana-ga suna-mit taku-guma-vaa?  
       mother-my what-acc see-want-3sg.interr  
       'What does my mother want to see?'
   
   b.   (?) anaanaga takugumavaa sunamit?  

   c.   (?) sunamit anaanaga takugumavaa?  

   d.   (?) sunamit takugumavaa anaanaga?  

   e.   (?) takugumavaa anaanaga sunamit?  

   f.   (?) takugumavaa sunamit anaanaga?

In an answer to a question, the non-wh-object (new information) can be found in the same position as its wh-counterpart (though not necessarily).

(11)  
   a.   Alana suna-mit niuvi-qau-vaa?  
       Alana what-acc buy-past-3sg.interr  
       'What did Alana buy?'
   
   b.   Alana titirauti-mit niuvi-qau-juq  
       Alana pencil-acc buy-past-3sg.indic  
       'Alana bought a pencil'

Indirect objects, such as *kinamut* 'to/for whom' (Allative Case), are also preferably placed between the subject and the verb.

(12)  
   a.   ataata-ga kina-mut qaja-liu-mat?  
       father-my who-allat kayak-make-3sg.caus  
       'Who is my father making a kayak for?'
   
   b.   (?) ataataga qajaliumat kinamut?  

   c.   (?) kinamut ataataga qajaliumat?  

   d.   (?) qajaliumat ataataga kinamut?

Note that in (12), the causative mood morphology is used, not the interrogative, but this does not affect word order preferences (even though the clause in (12a, b) is not typed as interrogative).

In questions with wh-adjuncts *nami* 'where' and *qanga* 'when', both wh-initial orders and wh-word between the subject and the verb were judged equally acceptable.

(13)  
   a.   nami Lisi ijiq-sima-vaa?  
       where Lisi hide-pres-3sg.interr  
       'Where is Lisi hiding?'
   
   b.   Lisi nami ijiqsimavaa?
In multiple questions, there is a preference to place all wh-words pre-verbally (although the same constituents do not need to be in the same position in the answer).

(14)  
   a.  kina qanga qai-guma-vaa?  
       who when come-want-3sg.interr  
       'Who wants to come when?'
   
   b.  uvanga qai-guma-junga siuru  
       1sg.emph come-want-3sg.indic later  
       'As for me, I want to come later'

(15)  
   kina suna-mit kina-mut tunisi-vaa  
   who what-acc who-all give-3s.interr  
   'Who gave what to whom?'

The data presented in this section is consistent with the data in Gillon (1999), except that my informant just dispreferred the orders that Gillon's informants judged unacceptable. In fact, though Gillon argues for movement of wh-words to Spec, CP, the first orders given by her for each example are Subject-Wh-V. I repeat (2a) (Gillon's (16a)) below as (16).

(16)  
   Piipi suna-mik qukir-sir-qau-vaa  
   Phoebe what-acc shoot-ap-reepst-3sg.intr.interr.  
   'What did Phoebe hit?'

There is also a PF constraint against having sequences of (even partially) homophonous wh-words: kina 'who (abs.)' and kinamut 'who (allat.)' next to each other were judged bad.

(17)  
   a.  *kina kina-mut suna-mit tunisi-vaa  
       who who-allat what-acc give-3s.interr  
       'Who gave what to whom?'
   
   b.  kina suna-mit kina-mut tunisi-vaa

The same constraint acts in Slavic languages (Billings & Rudin 1996, Bošković 2002). The following example is from Bulgarian, the language that normally requires all wh-words to front.

(18)  
   a.  Kakvo obuslavlja kakvo?  
       what conditions what  
       'What conditions what?'
   
   b.  *Kakvo kakvo obuslavlja?
Thus, there seem to be three constraints on the unmarked word order in Inuktitut wh-questions: the requirement to place wh-words in a pre-verbal position, the requirement to place subjects in the highest of overtly filled positions, and the constraint against homophonous sequences.

In order to proceed with the analysis, let us look at the word order in declarative sentences in Inuktitut.

4 Word order in declarative sentences

In declarative sentences, word order in Inuktitut is said to be 'free'; however, as it is usually the case for flexible word-order languages, it is defined by pragmatic considerations (Fortesque 1984 for West Greenlandic).

Gillon (1999) analyzed Inuktitut as a polysynthetic language, adopting Baker's (1996) Polysynthesis Parameter. For Baker, lexical NPs in polysynthetic languages are adjuncts, they freely adjoin to IP, and this is why the word order in such languages is free. Robust noun incorporation in a given language is an indication that this language is polysynthetic. However, Inuktitut, according to one of Baker's criteria of robustness of noun incorporation in a language, is not truly polysynthetic. In languages with robust noun incorporation, both the noun root and the verb root can be used independently; however, Baker cites, among others, Fortesque (1984), who observed that in Inuktitut (West Greenlandic dialect) noun incorporation is obligatory with some words and forbidden with the rest. This is true for other dialects, including South Baffin, as well (Johns, p.c.). In the examples below, N is obligatorily incorporated.

\[
\begin{align*}
(19) \quad a. \quad & \text{sunaturu-ma-vit?} \\
& \text{what-eat/drink-want-2sg.interr} \\
& \text{'What do you want to have?'} \\

b. \quad & *\text{tu-ruma-vit suna} \\

c. \quad & \text{ti-tu-ruma-vunga} \\
& \text{tea-eat/drink-want-1sg.indic} \\
& \text{'I want to have tea'} \\

d. \quad & *\text{tu-ruma-vunga ti}
\end{align*}
\]

In addition, Baker claims that polysynthetic languages have truly free word order, and no basic word order can be defined. However, SOV was often observed to be the most frequent and preferred order (Fortesque 1984, my own fieldwork). Moreover, in my fieldwork, I found a preference for placing a subject sentence-initially; a similar preference was found in North Baffin by Spreng (p.c). Therefore, Inuktitut is not a true polysynthetic language in terms of Baker (1996), and its properties are not defined by the Polysynthesis Parameter.

In fact, Inuktitut patterns much more like scrambling languages: it has overt subject-verb agreement, overt Case-marking, and movement driven by discourse factors.
Fortesque (1984, West Greenlandic) reports that in declarative sentences with OSV order, the object is most likely to be the topic; with SVO, the object is the focus; and with OVS, the subject is the focus. Object-before-subject orders are particularly common if the object refers back to preceding context, i.e. when the object is given information. In addition, Inuktitut lacks overt definiteness markers, but word order bears on interpretation of DPs as being definite or indefinite: those in the initial position are more likely to be definite, and indefinite DPs mentioned for the first time (new information focus) are likely to be introduced in a post-verbal position. There is also interaction of word order and prosody (higher pitch on emphasized constituents, etc.). All this looks like regular universal patterns, familiar from topic/focus movement in scrambling languages (e.g. Slavic). Fortesque also notes that these are "tendencies rather then strict rules", which is usually the case with topic/focus movement. Both cross-linguistically and (with certain restrictions) within a language, topic and focus requirements can be satisfied either by syntactic means (movement, clefting, etc.) and/or by prosodic marking of focused constituents.

In my fieldwork data from South Baffin, the order that was given first in discourse-neutral declarative sentences was either SOV or SVO. However, when I elicited an object as a topic and a subject as a focus (context given in 20a), I got OSV (20b), with the topic in the highest overtly filled position, and the focus pre-verbally, but lower than the topic.

(20)  a.  Context: 'At a potluck party, you see a delicious fish dish and you wonder who brought it; you ask and get the following reply.'

    b.  iqalu-mit Miali naksaq-tuq

        fish-acc Mary brought-3sg.indic

        'As for the fish, it was Mary who brought it'

Interestingly, data from the same dialect as in Gillon (1999), Mittimatalik, collected by Spreng (p.c.), differs from that collected by Gillon with respect to word order in declarative sentences. Word orders in declarative sentences have the same restrictions both in ergative (21) and in antipassive (22). The preferred orders are SOV (21a) for ergative and SVO (22a) for antipassive (MIK stands for an NP marked with the inflection -mik, the equivalent of South Baffin -mit).

(21)  a.  Erg Abs V

    b.  Abs Erg V

    c.  Erg V Abs

    d.  *Abs V Erg

    e.  *V Erg Abs

    f.  *V Abs Erg

(22)  a.  Abs V MIK

    b.  Abs MIK V

    c.  MIK Abs V

    d.  *MIK V Abs

    e.  *V Abs MIK

    f.  *V MIK Abs
In this data, the subject cannot appear lower than the verb. This is parallel to what Gillon (1999) found for wh-questions: a wh-word cannot appear lower than the verb. Unlike wh-words, subject DPs in declarative sentences do not have to type the clause or be bound by wh-operators. However, all things being equal, subjects are, cross-linguistically, more likely to be topics, and wh-words are standardly assumed to be inherently focused (bearing contrastive, or, in terms of E.Kiss (1998), identificational focus).

Therefore, it appears that Inuktitut is a scrambling language, i.e. it exhibits topic/focus-driven movement in declarative sentences.

5 Inuktitut and wh-typology

Cheng (1997) suggested the Clausal Typing Hypothesis: every wh-clause must be typed as such. According to her, there are two typing strategies: an interrogative particle (as in Chinese) and wh-movement to Spec, CP (as in English); a given language can have only one of these strategies.

Inuktitut has an equivalent of an interrogative particle (interrogative mood suffix on verbs). According to Cheng, if a language has one, it is an in-situ language, and there is no need, and even no possibility to type clauses by wh-movement to Spec, CP. And indeed, as seen from previous sections, fronting of wh-words in Inuktitut is not obligatory (unlike wh-movement in English-type languages).

Gillon (1999) noted that the interrogative mood suffix is not always present in wh-questions: sometimes another mood suffix is used instead, such as causative in Mittimatalik and South Baffin; it adds presuppositional flavour to a question. Compare (23a) and (23b) (Mittimatalik, from Gillon 1999).

(23)  a.  kina taku-laur-paa taiksuminga angu-mmit?
   who see-past-3sg.interr that man-abl
   'Who saw that man?'

   b.  kina taku-laur-mat taiksuminga angu-mmit?
   who see-past-3sg.caus that man-abl
   'Who (is it that) saw that man?'

However, the presence or absence of the interrogative suffix does not affect word order in wh-questions (except for D-linked wh-phrases, which I am not dealing with in this paper). Moreover, only interrogative mood is used in yes/no questions, and for Cheng, it is enough if a language has an interrogative particle just in yes/no questions: this implies the presence of an interrogative particle in wh-questions as well, not necessarily an overt one.

Inuktitut has another property of wh-in-situ languages: the possibility of both single-pair and pair-list answers to multiple wh-questions (Bošković 2002, inter alia). Wh-movement languages allow only pair-list answers (compare possible answers to the same questions in Inuktitut and English).
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(24)  a.  kina-mut Alana niuvi-qau-vaa suna-mit?
    who-allat Alana buy-past-3sg.interr what-acc
    'What did Alana buy for whom?'

    b.  Alana Marina-mut kiik niuvi-qau-juq
        Alana Marina-allat cake buy-past-3sg.indic
        'Alana bought Marina a cake'

(25)  a.  What did Alana buy for whom?
    b.  *Alana bought Marina a cake
    c.  Alana bought a cake for Marina and chocolates for Bettina

However, as Gillon (1999) noted, in addition to attested multiple fronting of wh-words, Inuktitut has another property of multiple wh-fronting languages, such as Slavic languages, etc. Indefinites and polarity items in these languages and in Inuktitut consist of a wh-word and a corresponding operator. The examples below are from South Baffin.

(26)  suna      suna-kiaq      suna-mit      suna-mi-kiaq
       what      what-indef   what-acc     what-acc-indef
       'what'    'something'   'what (acc)'  'something (acc)'

According to Cheng (1997), wh-words in such languages do not have inherent interrogative force, and they must compose with a null wh-operator in questions. It is the null wh-operator licensing that requires movement of all wh-words to Spec, CP. In languages with an interrogative particle, wh-words receive interrogative force from the particle. This could explain why multiple wh-fronting is not obligatory in Inuktitut, but in fact Slavic languages (which are prototypical multiple wh-fronting languages) also have an interrogative particle *li* in yes/no (and, in some of these languages, also in wh-questions, which is used optionally.

Bošković (2002) showed that multiple wh-fronting languages do not display uniform behavior with respect to wh-movement, and thus this type of language should be eliminated from the cross-linguistic typology concerning the behavior of wh-phrases. A deeper analysis of multiple wh-fronting languages demonstrates that they are scattered across three other types (English-type, French-type, and Chinese-type), differing from the prototypical language of their type only in the presence of the focus requirement, which forces all wh-phrases to move overtly (independently of wh-movement). Thus Bulgarian belongs to English type (obligatory wh-movement), Serbo-Croatian, to French type (wh-movement in certain cases), and Russian, to Chinese-type (does not require wh movement). According to Bošković, the focus requirement camouflaged the behavior of these languages with respect to wh-movement. Inuktitut then belongs to the Chinese-type, i.e. patterns with Russian (though in Russian, the preference for fronting of all wh-words is stronger). Therefore, it is the requirement to move contrastively focused constituents (including wh-words) that is the common property of multiple wh-fronting languages (as suggested by Rudin (1988) and others).

Since wh-fronting in Inuktitut is optional, and otherwise it has properties of an in-situ language, it is even more clear that the driving force of wh-fronting (when it happens)
is the focus requirement, not typing, checking features, or licensing wh-operators. Cheng (1997) argued that wh-fronting in optional fronting languages (which, according to her, are in-situ languages) is the result of clefting (which is a focusing structure) or topicalization (in Egyptian Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia and Palauan). That is, wh-fronting in optional fronting languages is driven by the same forces as scrambling.

6 Wh-fronting in Inuktitut

In this section, I will discuss derivation of Inuktitut wh-questions. As we have seen, the preferred word order in a wh-question in Inuktitut is the following:

(27) Subj Wh-word(s) ... V

Wh-words move into a position which is higher than the verb but lower than the subject position. This landing site cannot be Spec, CP, unless the subject moves even higher. This is the analysis that Rudin (1993) suggested for Bulgarian topicalized Subjects: they adjoin to CP and thus precede wh-phrases located in Spec, CP. However, such constituents in Slavic languages are contrastive topics. For example, in Russian, they are marked by intonation (stress) and can be preceded by a topic marker -to and/or by a 'but/and', as shown in (28).

(28) (A) Ivan(-to) što kupi-l?
    but/and Ivan-topic what buy-pst-3sg.masc
    'But what did IVAN buy?'
    ('don't tell me what others bought, I want to know about Ivan')

In Inuktitut, the order given in (27) is the unmarked order, without any additional topic or focus features in the numeration, whereas (28) is marked. Therefore, the contrastive topic analysis does not work for Inuktitut sentence-initial subjects in wh-questions.

Persian is similar to Inuktitut with respect to wh-fronting. Persian also has an interrogative particle in yes/no questions, and wh-words move into a position between the subject and the verb (Kahnemuyipour 2001). Kahnemuyipour (2001) shows that this position is also the locus of non-wh contrastively focused elements, and argues that it is directly above vP. He assumes that the subject is in its canonical position, Spec, TP, and therefore wh-words move higher than the verb, but inside TP. Since manner adverbs precede wh-words in Persian (and manner adverbs are generally assumed to be adjoined to vP), he concludes that wh-words move directly above, and not higher than, vP.
Unfortunately, tests involving adverb placement are difficult to do in Inuktitut, because manner adverbs are often incorporated into verbs. Adjunction to vP seems the right solution for Inuktitut as well, but more research is needed to find out what exactly the landing site of wh-words in Inuktitut is.

7 Conclusion and further research

I showed that Inuktitut is a wh-in-situ language in which wh-words are fronted to a pre-verbal position below TP, and this fronting is focus-driven, because wh-words are generally assumed to be inherently contrastively focused. Though Inuktitut has been traditionally analyzed as a polysynthetic language, it appears not different from languages traditionally analyzed as scrambling languages. Focus and topic are important features in the syntax of Inuktitut: they require movement of a constituent bearing such a feature.

Three constraints define the unmarked word order in Inuktitut wh-questions. First, there is the requirement to place contrastively focused constituents, including wh-words, in a pre-verbal position. The second requirement is to place topics (which in default cases are subjects) in the highest of overtly filled positions. There is also a PF constraint against homophonous sequences. Given these clear constraints, an optimality-theoretic account would be a promising way to analyze the Inuktitut data.

Another promising direction would also be to look for a cross-linguistic correlation between flexible word order, the presence of the strong focus requirement, and wh-fronting which is not wh-movement (such as multiple wh-fronting, wh-fronting in the presence of an interrogative particle, etc.). So far, languages mentioned in this paper that have wh-fronting which is not wh-movement also have focus movement in non-wh clauses (Inuktitut, Slavic languages, Hungarian, Persian, Basque).

References
