

Focus/wh-association in RD

RD in Cantonese [CC], Mandarin [MC], and Japanese [JP] allows for a peculiar “leftward” association of ‘only/the-hell’ expressions

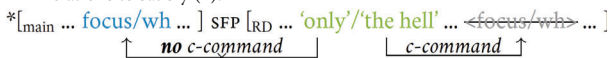
- (1) [Aaming zungji \_ nibun syuF zaa3] zinghai. [CC]
Ming like this book SFP only
'Ming only likes this book.'
(2) [\_ Shei hui lai a] daodi? [MC]
who will come SFP the.hell
'Who the hell will come?'
(3) Dare-ga ki-ta n-da, ittai? [JP]
who-NOM come-PST nMLZ-COP the.hell
'Who the hell came?'

Note that RD in the three languages are often gapped, and both arguments and adjuncts can undergo RD (Tanaka 2001, Cheung 2009, Yip 2025)

‘Only/the-hell’ has a particular c-command requirement of focus/wh-association

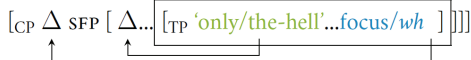
(4) ‘Only/the-hell’ expressions must c-command the pronounced copy of their focus/wh-associate.

All existing approaches on RD (with movement and ellipsis/slucing) cannot generate the correct c-command relations to satisfy (4):



Not movement

Prominent approach to RD: Monoclausal movement (Cheung 1997, 2009; Chiang 2017; Lee 2017, 2021; Wei & Li 2018; Yip 2020; i.a.)



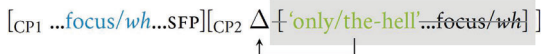
However, focus cannot move out of only’s scope (Jackendoff 1972; Tancredi 1990; Erlewine 2014, i.a.)

- The same is true for ‘the-hell’ expressions (Huang & Ochi 2004)
Topicalization, relativization, focus movement (A’); raising (A)
Although they allow for vanilla reconstruction (for quantifiers & anaphors; Y.-h. A. Li 2000; Law and Pan 2023; Yip & Ahenkorah 2023)

- (5) \*Ni zek gauF, Aaming zinghai m-zungji \_ aa3. [CC]
this CL dog Ming only not-like \_ SFP
Int.: ‘Ming only doesn’t like this dog.’
(6) \*Na zhi gou, ZS daodi bu-xihuan \_ le? [MC]
which CL dog ZS the.hell not-like \_ SFP
Int.: ‘Which dog does ZS not like?’

Not ellipsis/slucing

Alternative approach to RD: Biclausal slucing (Tanaka 2001; Cheung 2015; Tang 2015, 2018; Yip 2025; cf. Ott & de Vries 2016)



However, only cannot associate into ellipsis sites (Beaver & Clark 2008; Bassi, Hirsch & Trinh 2022; cf. Cheung 2009:213)

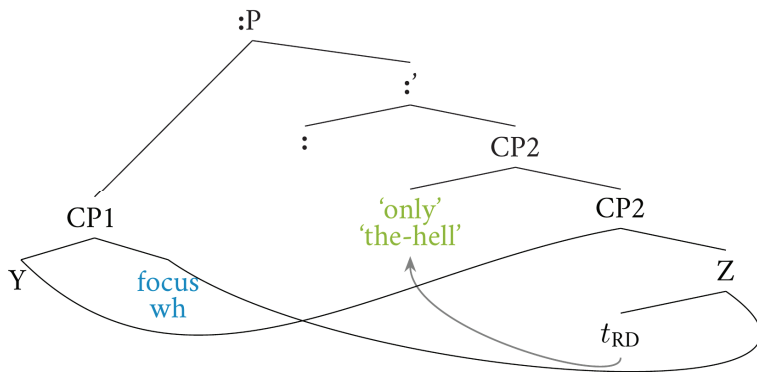
- (7) Aaming zinghai wui maai siusyutF. [CC]
Ming only will buy novel
\*Aafan dou zinghai wui [vɿ maai siusyutɿ]
Fan also only will
'Ming will only buy novels. Fan as well.'
The same is true for ‘the-hell’ expressions
Wh-words may independently be elided in fragment questions which have a slucing syntax (H. Li 2015; Wei 2018), but ellipsis fails with ‘the-hell’

- (8) a. Ta [mingtian/ daodi] qu na? (Xuexiao.) [MC]
3sg tomorrow/ the.hell go where school
'Where will he go tomorrow?' 'School.'
b. Na ni [mingtian/ \*daodi] [vɿ] ne?
then 2sg tomorrow/ the.hell go where SFP
'Where(\*the-hell) will you go (tmr)?'

[main ... focus/wh ...] SFP [RD ‘only/the-hell’ <...>]

What is the nature of the silence in RD?

- Movement? NO.
Ellipsis? NO.
Multidominance? YES!



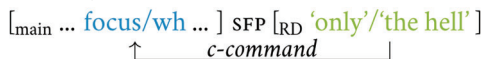
A novel approach: RD as multidominance

Adopting Citko’s (2005) Parallel Merge to RD:

(9) CP2 shares every node with CP1 except for the defocused element(s) that undergo(es) mvt.

Resemble “non-bulk sharing” structures in conjoined wh-questions (e.g., Gračanin-Yuksek 2007)

- All shared nodes pronounce in the main chunk
Generates correct c-command relations to satisfy (4): (à la Wilder 1999)



Multidominance is not just another pathway to silence, but it differs from Copy Deletion (movement) and ellipsis in creating distinct structural relations

Wilder’s (1999) definition of c-command

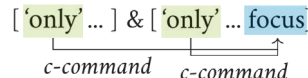
- Sharing: alpha is shared by X and Y iff (i) neither of X and Y dominates the other, and (ii) both X and Y dominate alpha
Full dominance: X fully dominates alpha iff X dominates alpha and X does not share alpha
X c-commands alpha iff (i) X != alpha, (ii) X does not fully dominate alpha, (iii) alpha does not dominate X, and (iv) all categories that dominate X dominate alpha.

Beyond RD: Right-Node Raising

- RNR is analyzed with multidominance (Wilder 1999; Belk, Neeleman & Philip 2023; MC: Cheng 2009; i.a.)
Focus association of ‘only’ is also possible, corroborating the multidominant analysis

- (10) [Aaming zinghai zungji \_] ji [Aafan zinghai toujim nibun syuF] [CC]
Ming only like but Fan only hate this book
'Ming only likes, but Fan only hates, this book.'

Only in 1st-conjunct c-commands and associates with the pronounced object in 2nd-conjunct.



A new diagnostic test for multidominance!

Also true in English – See Yip & Tamar-Mattis’s (2025 April) WCCFL talk!

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Selected references • Beaver, D. I. & B. Z. Clark. 2008. Sense and Sensitivity: How Focus Determines Meaning. • Cheung, L. Y.-L. 2009. “Dislocation focus construction in Chinese.” JEAL 18(3): 197–232. • Citko, B. 2005. “On the nature of Merge: External Merge, Internal Merge, and Parallel Merge.” L1 36(4): 475–496. • Gračanin-Yuksek, M. 2007. “About sharing.” PhD diss., MIT. • Huang, C.-T. J. & M. Ochi. 2004. “Syntax of the hell: Two types of dependencies.” In NELS 34 1:279–294. • Lee, T. T.-M. 2017. “Defocalization in Cantonese right dislocation.” Gengo Kenkyu 152:59–87. • Wilder, C. 1999. “Right Node Raising and the LCA.” In WCCFL 18, 586–598. • Yip, K.-F. 2025. “A unified biclausal approach to right dislocation in Chinese.” Ms., Yale University. https://lingbuzz.net/lingbuzz/007912

More trees & data



**Movement of the associates fails**

- (1) Focus association fails with movement [C]
- a. *Topicalization*  
 \*[Ni zek gau]<sub>[F]</sub>, Aaming **zinghai** m-zungji \_.  
 this CL dog Ming only not-like \_  
 Int.: 'Ming only doesn't like this dog.' (ONLY: 'This dog, Ming only doesn't like.')
- b. *Relativization*  
 \*[Aaming<sub>k</sub> **zinghai** m-zungji \_ ge] [ni zek gau]<sub>[F]</sub>  
 Ming only not-like \_ GE this CL dog  
 Int.: 'The dog x such that Ming only doesn't like x' (ONLY: 'The dog that Ming only doesn't like')
- (2) Wh-association fails with movement (Topicalization) [C]  
 \*[Bin zek gau]<sub>[F]</sub>, Aaming **doudai** m-zungji \_?  
 which CL dog Ming the.hell not-like \_  
 Int.: 'Which dog does Ming not like?'
- (3) Reconstruction for reflexive binding [C]
- a. *Reconstruction possible with a movement-derived topic*  
 [keoizigei<sub>k</sub> zek gau]<sub>i</sub>, Aaming<sub>k</sub> hou zungji \_<sub>i</sub> gaa3  
 3SG.self CL dog Ming very like \_ SFP  
 Lit.: 'Himself<sub>k</sub>'s dog, Ming<sub>k</sub> only likes.' (i.e. Ming<sub>k</sub> likes his<sub>k</sub> dog.)
- b. *Reconstruction possible with a movement-derived wh-topic*  
 [Bin zek keoizigei<sub>k</sub> ge gau]<sub>i</sub>, Aaming<sub>k</sub> zeoi zungji \_<sub>i</sub> aa3?  
 which CL 3SG.self GE dog Ming most like \_ SFP  
 'Which dog of himself<sub>k</sub> Ming<sub>k</sub> likes the most?'
- c. *Reconstruction impossible with a base-generated topic*  
 \*[(nei waa) keoizigei<sub>k</sub> zek gau (aa4)]<sub>i</sub>, Aaming<sub>k</sub> hou zungji keoi<sub>i</sub> ge cinzyujan gaa3  
 2SG say 3SG.self CL dog TOP Ming very like 3SG GE former.owner SFP  
 Lit.: 'As for the dog<sub>i</sub> of himself<sub>k</sub>, Ming<sub>k</sub> likes its<sub>i</sub> former owner.'
- (4) Focus association fails with reconstruction [C]
- a. \*[Keoizigei<sub>k</sub> zek gau]<sub>[F]</sub><sub>i</sub>, Aaming<sub>k</sub> **zinghai** zungji \_<sub>i</sub> gaa3  
 3SG.self CL dog Ming only like \_ SFP  
 Lit.: 'Himself<sub>k</sub>'s dog, Ming<sub>k</sub> only likes.'
- b. Aaming<sub>k</sub> **zinghai** zungji [keoizigei<sub>k</sub> zek gau]<sub>[F]</sub><sub>i</sub> gaa3  
 Ming only like 3SG.self CL dog SFP  
 'Ming<sub>k</sub> only likes his<sub>k</sub> dog (lit.: himself<sub>k</sub>'s dog).'
- (5) Wh association fails with reconstruction [C]
- a. \*[Bin zek keoizigei<sub>k</sub> ge gau]<sub>i</sub>, Aaming<sub>k</sub> **doudai** zeoi zungji \_<sub>i</sub> aa3?  
 which CL 3SG.self GE dog Ming the.hell most like \_ SFP  
 Int.: '(After all,) which dog of himself<sub>k</sub> Ming<sub>k</sub> likes the most?'
- b. Aaming<sub>k</sub> **doudai** zeoi zungji [bin zek keoizigei<sub>k</sub> ge gau]<sub>i</sub> aa3?  
 Ming the.hell most like which CL 3SG.self GE dog SFP  
 '(After all,) which dog of himself<sub>k</sub> Ming<sub>k</sub> likes the most?'
- Cheung (2011): a post-syntactic PF movement alternative
  - If extraposition in English like (6) is PF phrasal movement but not A'/wh-movement (Göbbel, Bainbridge, and Agbayani 2007) - which is also controversial - we can use it to test "PF-movement" of focus out of *only*'s domain.
  - However, it does not license focus association.
- (6) a. [A man with blond hair] came into the room.  
 b. [A man \_<sub>i</sub>] came into the room [with blond hair]<sub>i</sub>.  
 c. \*[With what color hair]<sub>i</sub> did [a man \_<sub>i</sub>] come into the room? (Göbbel, Bainbridge, and Agbayani 2007, ex. 10a-b)

- (7) a. [**Only** a man *with blond hair*<sub>[F]</sub>] came into the room.  
 b. \***[Only** a man *\_\_i*] came into the room *with blond hair*<sub>[F]i</sub>. (Intended reading = (a))

### Ellipsis/slucing of the associates fails

- (8) Focus association fails in VP ellipsis [C]

- a. Aaming **zinghai** wui maai siusyut<sub>[F]</sub>. \*Aafan dou **zinghai** wui [<sub>VP</sub> maai siusyut<sub>[F]</sub>]  
 Ming only will buy novel Fan also only will  
 Int.: 'Ming will only buy novels. Fan as well.'
- b. Aaming wui **zinghai** maai siusyut<sub>[F]</sub>. Aafan dou wui [<sub>VP</sub> zinghai maai siusyut<sub>[F]</sub>]  
 Ming will only buy novel Fan also will  
 'Ming will only buy novels. Fan as well.'

- Cheung (2015) suggests that the focus and *wh* association in RD is exceptionally licensed by "PF slucing" (as opposed to ellipsis)
- Interrogative *wh*-words can be elided in fragment questions (cf. Li 2015 for Mandarin)

- (9) Interrogative *wh*-words elided in fragment questions [C]

- Q1. Aaming tingjat wui heoi **bindou**? A1. Tousyugun.  
 Ming tomorrow will go where library  
 'Where will Ming go tomorrow?' 'Library.'
- Q2. Gam Aafan (**tingjat**) ne? A2. Hokhaau.  
 then Fan tomorrow TOP school  
 'What about Fan (tomorrow)?' 'School.'  
 (i.e. Where will Fan go tomorrow?)

- (10) Slucing in question fragments repairs islands selectively

- a. [<sub>CP</sub> Question fragment [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>Leit-branch/Sent.-Subj.</sub>     ... ]]] ]  
 ↑  
 b. \* [<sub>CP</sub> Question fragment [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>CNPI/Adjunct</sub>     ... ]]] ]  
 ↑

- (11) *Wh* association fails in fragment questions [C]

- Q1. Aaming **doudai** wui heoi **bindou**? A1. Tousyugun.  
 Ming the.hell will go where library  
 'Where the hell will Ming go?' 'Library.'
- Q2. \*Gam Aafan **doudai** ne?  
 then Fan the.hell TOP  
 Int.: 'What about Fan?'

- (12) Fragment polar questions (baseline) [C]

- Q1. Aaming tingjat wui heoi **tousyugun** aa4? A1. Wui.  
 Ming tmr. will go library SFP will  
 'Will Ming go to the library tomorrow?' 'He will.'
- Q2. Gam Aafan (**tingjat**) ne? A2. Dou wui.  
 then Fan tomorrow TOP also will  
 'What about Fan (tomorrow)?' 'She will as well.'  
 (i.e. Will Fan go to the library tomorrow?)

- (13) Focus association fails in fragment questions [C]

- Q1. Aaming **zinghai** wui heoi **tousyugun** aa4? A1. Wui.  
 Ming only will go library SFP will  
 'Will Ming only go to the library?' 'He will.'
- Q2. \*Gam Aafan **zinghai** ne?  
 then Fan only TOP  
 Int.: 'What about Fan?'

(14) Verbal echo answers

Q. Aaming sengjat tai nibun syu gaa4?  
 Ming often read this book SFP  
 'Does Ming often read this book?'  
 A. Sengjat tai.  
 often read  
 'Ming often reads this book.'

(15) Focus association fails in verbal echo answers

Q. Aaming **zinghai** tai [nibun syu]<sub>[F]</sub> gaa4?  
 Ming only read this book SFP  
 'Does Ming only read this book?'  
 A. \***Zinghai** tai.  
 only read  
 'Ming only reads this book.' [C]

- Just to complete the pattern, English sluicing, which has been argued extensively as PF sluicing (e.g., Merchant 2001, 2004), also fails the test of focus association

(16) Baseline: Focus association without sluicing

- They **only** don't know that John took FRENCH. (but know whether he took German)
- They **only** don't know that some specific person took FRENCH. (but know whether that person took German)
- They **only** don't know who took FRENCH. (but know who took GERMAN)

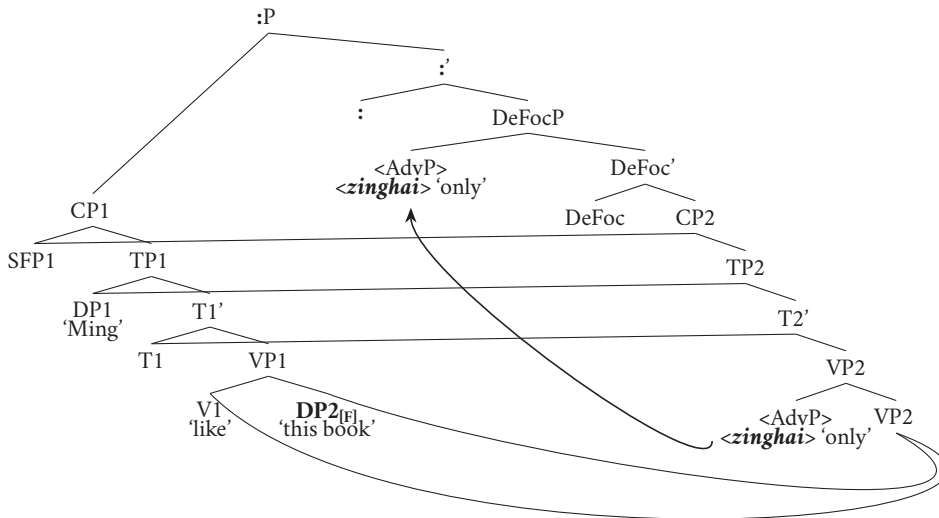
(17) Test case: Focus association with sluicing

- Someone took French. ...
- ... I don't know which person took FRENCH, though I know who took GERMAN.
  - ... I don't know which person ~~took FRENCH~~, though I know who took GERMAN.
  - \*... I **only** don't know which person ~~took FRENCH~~, though I know who took GERMAN.  
 (with FRENCH as the intended associate)

**A multidominant analysis**

(18) A sample derivation of right dislocation of adverb 'only'

Lit.: 'Ming likes *this book*, only.' cf. (??)



**Focus/wh-association in Right Node Raising**

(19) [ Subj V \_ ] & [ Subj V XP] (an RNR configuration)

(20) Right Node Raising in Cantonese

[Aaming jatzik zungji] ji [Aafan jatzik toujim nibun syu]  
 Ming all.the.time like but Fan all.the.time hate this book  
 'Ming always likes, but Fan always hates, this book.'  
 (i.e. Ming likes this book all the time and Fan hates this book all the time)

(21) [ 'only'/doudai ... \_ ] & [ 'only'/doudai ... overt associate]

(22) Focus association is licensed in RNR [C, same in M]

[Aaming **zinghai** zungji] ji [Aafan **zinghai** toujim [**nibun syu**]<sub>[F]</sub>]  
 Ming only like but Fan only hate this book  
 'Ming only likes, but Fan only hates, *this book*.'

(23) Wh association is licensed in RNR [C]

[Aaming **doudai** zungji] tungmaai [Aafan **doudai** toujim [**binbun syu**]] aa3?  
 Ming the.hell like and Fan the.hell hate which book sFP  
 'After all, which is the book x is such that Ming likes x and Fan hates x?'

(24) He **only** likes, and she also **only** likes, *this book*<sub>F</sub>.

(25) The licensing configuration in RNR  
 [ 'only'/doudai ... ] & [ 'only'/doudai ... focus/wh ]  
 c-command c-command

(26) The multidominance approach to RNR

