

# *Wh-the-Hell vs. Ittai+Wh-Phrase*

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## 1 Introduction

This paper compares English *wh-the-hell* and the corresponding Japanese *ittai+wh*-phrase and examines several similarities and differences between them. (1) and (2) show a typical example of *wh-the-hell* questions and *ittai* questions.

- (1) What the hell did John choose?
- (2) Ittai nani-o John-wa eranda no?  
ITTAI what-ACC John-NOM chose Q  
'What the hell did John choose?'

In Japanese, questions with the semantics and pragmatics of English *wh-the-hell* questions are rendered by containing the adverb *ittai* in addition to an appropriate *wh*-word. By considering similarities and differences between the two phrases, I will analyze the significance of a 'surprise-interpretation'—an interpretation that expects a surprising answer that a speaker cannot even imagine. I will point out that this surprise-interpretation constrains the behavior of *wh-the-hell* and *ittai+wh*-phrase with respect to (a) the case where it is important whether possible candidates for a *wh*-phrase has already been shared by both speaker and hearer in the earlier discourse (D-linking) and (b) the interpretation of multiple *wh*-questions.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 indicates two similarities and section 3 provides two differences between the two languages. Based on the discussion in sections 2 and 3, section 4 argues that a surprise interpretation plays a crucial role in both *wh-the-hell* questions and *ittai+wh*-phrase questions. Section 5 summarizes the main discussion of the paper.

## 2 Similarities

This section demonstrates two similarities between English *wh-the-hell* and Japanese *ittai+wh*-phrase by focusing on the semantic aspects of the *wh*-questions including *the hell/ittai*. Section 2.1 discusses what I call a 'surprise-interpretation'. Section 2.2 examines multiple *wh*-questions with a *wh-the-hell* phrase from the viewpoint of single pair readings and pair-list readings.

**2.1 Surprise-interpretation** According to Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002), *wh-the-hell* sentences are used generally when the speaker has some negative attitude about them. They claim that *wh-the-hell* questions imply some attitude of impatience or annoyance on the part of the speaker. In addition to these two negative attitudes, I would like to point out that there is also a 'surprise-interpretation' which expects a surprising answer that the speaker cannot even imagine. Following examples show the contrast between normal *wh*-questions and *wh-the-hell* questions in terms of surprise interpretation.

- (3) a. What did John forget?  
b. What the hell did John forget?

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- (4) a. Nani-o John-wa wasureta no?  
 What-ACC John-TOP forgot Q  
 ‘What did John forget?’
- b. Ittai nani-o John-wa wasureta no?  
 ITTAI what-ACC John-TOP forgot Q  
 ‘What the hell did John forget?’

Japanese example in (4) corresponds to the English example in (3). (3a) and (4a) are normal *wh*-questions, whereas (3b) and (4b) are a little different regarding that the speaker expects that John did indeed forget something surprising or extraordinary. This ‘surprise-interpretation’ is clearly acknowledged when considering answers for these questions. An answer like “*John forgot a pen.*” is fine for (3a) and (4a), while it usually sounds odd for (3b) and (4b). A felicitous answer for (3b) and (4b) would be something like “*John forgot his passport.*” since a passport is something a person would panic over forgetting when traveling abroad. This observation is the evidence of the claim that insertion of *the hell* and *ittai* yields surprise-interpretation.

**2.2 The unavailability of pair-list readings** Multiple *wh*-questions in English generally allow either a single-pair reading or a pair-list reading. When *the-hell* appears in multiple *wh*-questions, however, they can only derive a single-pair reading. Examples like the following illustrate this point.

- (5) a. Who bought what?  
 b. Who the hell bought what?

(5a) allows both a single-pair reading and a pair-list reading. For the latter interpretation, the answer would be like “*John bought a book, Bill bought pens, and Tom bought envelopes.*”. Once a *wh-the-hell* phrase appears as in (5b), pair-list interpretation is no longer available and only one unique pair would be the appropriate answer (see Den Dikken & Giannakidou [2002]). Note that the one unique pair answer for (5b) should be somewhat surprising since *wh-the-hell* questions has a surprise-interpretation as we discussed in the previous section.

The exact same phenomenon can be perceived in Japanese. Let us consider the Japanese examples corresponding to the English examples given above.

- (6) a. Dare-ga nani-o katta no?  
 Who-NOM what-ACC bought Q  
 ‘Who bought what?’
- b. Ittai dare-ga nani-o katta no?  
 ITTAI who-NOM what-ACC bought Q  
 ‘Who the hell bought what?’

Just like English (5a), both single-pair answer and list answers are allowed for Japanese (6a). In the same way as English (5b), Japanese (6b) lacks the pair-list reading and can only be interpreted as a single-pair question due to the *wh-the-hell* phrase. Both English *wh-the-hell* and Japanese *ittai+wh*-phrase block the pair-list readings in multiple *wh*-questions.

### 3 Differences

In this section, I will show two differences between *wh-the-hell* and *ittai+wh*-phrase in terms of *discourse-linking* (*D-linking*) issues based on Pesetsky (1987). If a sentence carries a D-linked phrase, there shall be a part of ‘common ground’ shared by both speaker and hearer which is established in the earlier discourse. Section 3.1 discusses the appearance of *the hell* with inherently non-D-linked *wh*-phrases. Section 3.2 gives a brief overview of *wh*-movement and *wh-in-situ* in the beginning and examines *the hell* with *wh-in-situ*. Both 3.1 and 3.2 demonstrate that English *the-hell* can only be added to non-D-linked *wh*-phrases, while Japanese *ittai* is allowed with both D-linked and non-D-linked *wh*-phrases (see Huang & Ochi [2004]).

**3.1 The hell with inherently D-linked wh-phrases** In English, *the hell* can only appear with *wh*-phrases that do not require D-linking as we can see in (7). The first six examples are grammatical since *the hell* is attached to inherently non-D-linked *wh*-phrases, whereas the last two sentences are ungrammatical with *the hell* added to

inherently D-linked *wh*-phrases.

- (7)
- a. What the hell happened?
  - b. Who the hell are you?
  - c. Where the hell have you been?
  - d. When the hell do we eat?
  - e. Why the hell are you here?
  - f. How the hell did you find this place?
  - g. \*Which the hell did John choose?
  - h. \*Which the hell of the two did John choose?

*Wh*-phrases that question objects (*what*), people (*who*), locations (*where*), times (*when*), reasons (*why*), and manners (*how*) can be interpreted as non-D-linked *wh*-phrases. Questions (7a) through (7f) can be used in a context without a presumption that either speaker or hearer has a particular set of possible answers in mind. Rather, the speaker has no idea of the answer. *Which*-phrases are crucially different from other *wh*-phrases. *Which* is an inherently D-linked *wh*-phrase. When the speaker asks a question like “*Which did John choose?*” the range of felicitous answers is limited by a set of choices both speaker and hearer have in mind. Similarly, in a question like “*Which of the two did John choose?*” the speaker assumes that both speaker and hearer share the two options that John intended to choose. (7g) and (7h) are ill-formed since *the-hell* is attached to an inherently D-linked *wh*-phrase. In other words, English *the-hell* cannot appear with a *wh*-phrase that should be D-linked (see Pesetsky [1987]).

The case is a little different in Japanese. What is interesting is that the corresponding Japanese examples allow *the hell* to surface with both D-linked and non-D-linked *wh*-phrases.

- (8)
- a. Ittai nani-ga okotta no?  
ITTAI what-NOM happened Q  
‘What the hell happened?’
  - b. (Anata-wa) ittai dare?  
You-TOP ITTAI who  
‘Who the hell are you?’
  - c. (Anata-wa) ittai doko-ni itteita no?  
You-TOP ITTAI where-to have been Q  
‘Where the hell have you been?’
  - d. Ittai itu taberu no?  
ITTAI when eat Q  
‘When the hell do we eat?’
  - e. (Anata-wa) ittai naze koko-ni iru no?  
You-TOP ITTAI why here exist Q  
‘Why the hell are you here?’
  - f. Ittai dooyatte kono basyo-o mituketa no?  
ITTAI how this place-ACC found Q  
‘How the hell did you find this place?’
  - g. John-wa ittai dore-o eranda no?  
John-TOP ITTAI which-ACC chose Q  
Lit. ‘Which the hell did John choose?’
  - h. John-wa ittai dotti-o eranda no?  
John-TOP ITTAI which of the two-ACC chose Q  
Lit. ‘Which the hell of the two did John choose?’

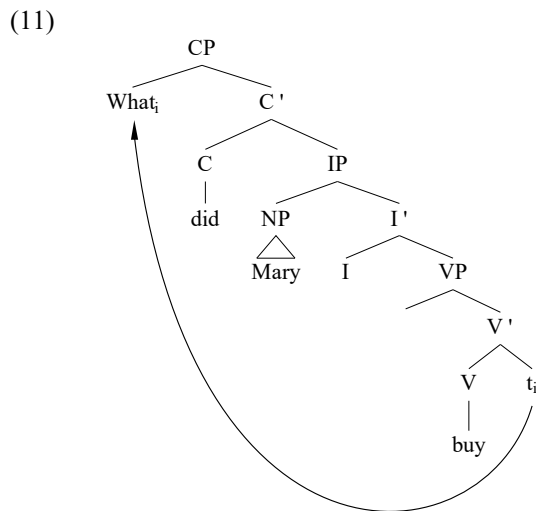
The well-formedness of the first six sentences in (8) parallels English (7a) through (7f). *Wh*-phrases in (8a)

through (8f) can be interpreted as non-D-linked *wh*-phrases. Note that the subject *anata-wa* in (8b), (8c), and (8e) are optional since Japanese is one of the languages allowing pro-drop. While English (7g) and (7h) are ungrammatical with *the hell* attaching to an inherently D-linked *wh*-phrase, the corresponding Japanese (8g) and (8h) are perfectly fine. The grammaticality of (8g) and (8h) suggests that Japanese *ittai* ‘the hell’ is able to appear with inherently D-linked *wh*-phrases as well as non-D-linked *wh*-phrases.

**3.2 The hell with *wh-in-situ*** In English, *wh*-questions are formed by fronting a *wh*-phrase which is headed by an interrogative determiner. This transformational process of constituent question formation is called *wh*-movement. Consider the following examples.

- (9) Mary bought a car.  
 (10) What did Mary buy?

*Wh*-question (10) is formed by questioning the object in (9). Assuming a syntactic structure with the functional layer of the C(omplementizer)-system followed by the functional layer of the I(nflectional)-system and the lexical layer of the V(erb)-system, *what* is moved from the domain of the V-system to the specifier of CP. The structure of this movement is shown in (11).

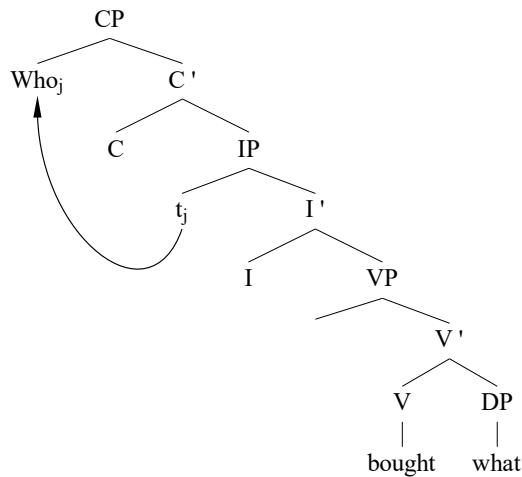


The *wh<sub>i</sub>*-phrase leaves a trace *t<sub>i</sub>*. Not all *wh*-phrases undergo overt movement as shown in multiple *wh*-question in (12) which is a constituent question formed by questioning both the subject and the object in (9).

- (12) Who bought what?

The subject *wh*-phrase *who* moves from Spec, IP to Spec, CP, while the object *wh*-phrase *what* remains ‘in-situ’. A *wh*-phrase that has not undergone *wh*-movement is called *wh-in-situ* (see Bayer [2006]). The structure of (12) is as in (13).

(13)



English *the hell* is able to appear with a *wh*-phrase that has undergone *wh*-movement but not with *wh*-in-situ as seen in the following examples.

- (14) a. Who the hell bought a rainbow colored car?  
 b. \*Mary bought what the hell?<sup>1</sup>

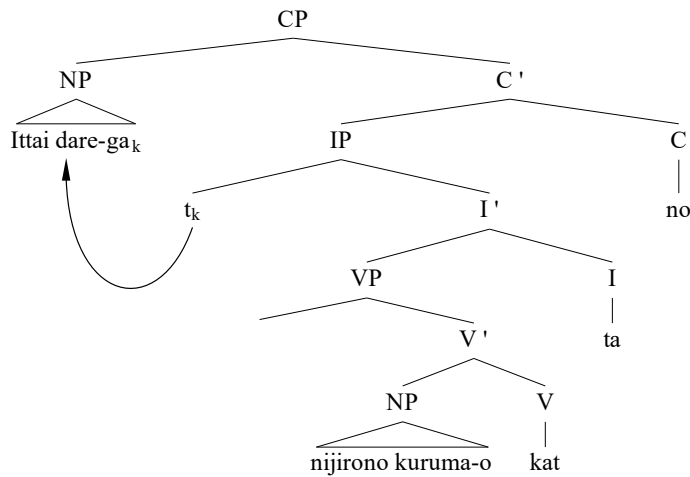
*The hell* in (14a) is attached to the subject *wh*-phrase *who* which is assumed to be in Spec, CP by *wh*-movement and thus grammatical. For (14b), it is ungrammatical because *the hell* is added to the object *wh*-phrase *what* that is remaining in-situ. This observation suggests that English *wh-the-hell* cannot stay in-situ and should appear in the beginning of a sentence.

Unlike English, Japanese allows *ittai+wh*-phrases to remain in-situ. Let us consider the Japanese examples corresponding to the English examples given above. The structures of the Japanese examples in (15) are shown in (16). Note that Japanese is a head-final language.

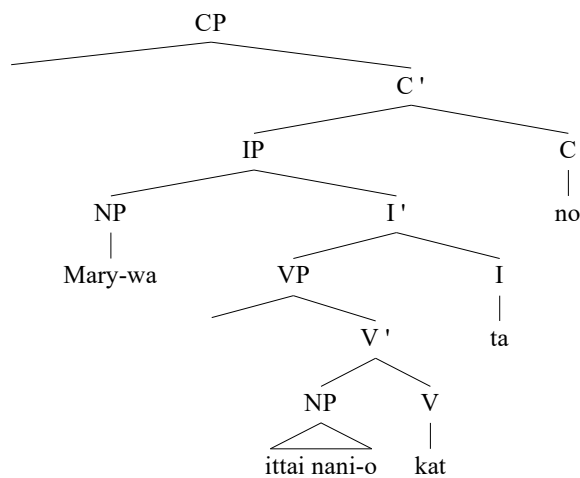
- (15) a. Ittai dare-ga nijiiro no kuruma-o katta no?  
 ITTAI who-NOM rainbow colored car-ACC bought Q  
 'Who the hell bought a rainbow colored car?'  
 b. Mary-wa ittai nani-o katta no?  
 Mary-TOP ITTAI what-ACC bought Q  
 Lit. 'Mary bought what the hell?'

<sup>1</sup> *The hell* cannot attach to *wh*-in-situ in multiple *wh*-questions as well; cf. \**Who bought what the hell?*

(16) a.



b.



Japanese (15a) parallels English (14a). Just like (14a), (15a) is well-formed with *ittai* linking to the subject *wh*-phrase *dare* ‘who’ which undergoes *wh*-movement. As for (15b) which is the Japanese version of English (14b), it is perfectly well-formed even though *ittai* is with the object *wh*-phrase *nani* ‘what’ which is a *wh*-phrase in-situ. Japanese *ittai* is allowed to modify both *wh*-phrases in Spec, CP and *wh*-in-situ.

Pesetsky (1987) claims that *wh*-in-situ in English should be D-linked. Considering that *wh*-the-hell cannot remain in-situ, he concludes that *wh*-the-hell cannot be D-linked. Japanese let *wh*-phrases to stay in-situ regardless of D-linking. Thus, it seems natural that *ittai*+*wh*-phrase has no problem staying in-situ. Also, we can assume that *ittai*+*wh*-phrase can be either D-linked or non-D-linked.

#### 4 Discussion

We have observed that both English *wh*-the-hell and Japanese *ittai*+*wh*-phrase induce a surprise-interpretation and block pair-list readings in multiple *wh*-questions. We have also examined the differences in distribution of *the hell* and *ittai* with inherently D-linked *wh*-phrases and *wh*-in-situ. Pesetsky (1987) argues that *the-hell* can only attach to non-D-linked *wh*-phrases, while Japanese *ittai* is allowed with D-linked *wh*-phrases as well as non-D-linked *wh*-phrases.

From these observations, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that it is not the D-linking characteristic but the surprise-interpretation that leads the unavailability of pair-list readings in multiple *wh*-questions with a *wh*-the-hell/*ittai*+*wh*-phrase in both languages. A speaker utters a question with *ittai*+*wh*-phrases with a surprise-interpretation because s/he has no idea of the answer. Once *wh*-the-hell appears, it is inappropriate to have multiple pair-list answers since the speaker, by using *wh*-the-hell/*ittai*+*wh*-phrase, is expecting a unique surprising answer for the question. Therefore, single-pair reading is the only natural interpretation that we can get from multiple *wh*-

questions with a *wh-the-hell* phrase.<sup>2</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The comparison of English *wh-the-hell* phrases and Japanese *ittai+wh*-phrases in this paper revealed both parallelism and differences between the two languages. It was shown that the surprise-interpretation and the unavailability of pair-list readings in multiple *wh*-questions are the similarities between these two phrases. It was also pointed out that the two phrases differ regarding D-linking by considering the appearance of *the hell* and *ittai* with inherently D-linked *wh*-phrases and *wh-in-situ*. From these similarities and differences between the two phrases, it was suggested that the surprise-interpretation leads the unavailability of pair-list readings in multiple *wh*-questions with a *wh-the-hell* phrase in both languages.

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<sup>2</sup> For further analysis, it might be worth considering whether a sentence like “*Which the hell at all did John choose?*” is better than “*Which the hell did John choose?*” due to *at all* emphasizing the implication that the speaker has no idea of the answer.